

BRITISH NAVAL STRATEGY IN THE FAR EAST,

1918 - 1942 : A STUDY OF PRIORITIES IN

THE QUESTION OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

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PETER GUY SILVERMAN

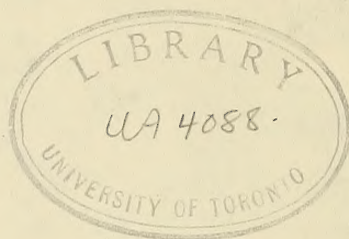
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British Naval Strategy In The Far East,  
1919 - 1942 : A Study Of Priorities In  
The Question Of Imperial Defence

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A Thesis in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy

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\* \* \*





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ABBREVIATIONS USED (MILITARY)

AA	Anti Aircraft
ABDA	Australian-British-Dutch-American Command
ACNO	Assistant Chief Naval Operations (USN)
AD	Anglo-Dutch
ADA	Anglo-Dutch-Australian
ADB	American-Dutch-British
AOC	Air Officer Commanding (RAF)
CAS	Chief of Air Staff
CinC	Commander in Chief
CDC	Colonial Defence Committee
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet (USN)
CNO	Chief of Naval Staff (RN)
COS	Chiefs of Staff
DCOS	Deputy Chiefs of Staff
DCNS	Deputy (or Vice) Chief of Naval Staff(RN)
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence (RN)
DOP	Director of Plans (RN)





DNO	Director of Naval Operations (RN)
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
JB	Joint Board (American)
JIS	Joint Intelligence Staff
JPSC	Joint Planning Sub-Committee
ODC	Overseas Defence Committee (of CID)
RAF	Royal Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RNZN	Royal New Zealand Navy
USN	United States Navy
VCNS	Vice Chief of Naval Staff (RN)
WPD	War Plans Department (US)

#### ABBREVIATIONS USED (REFERENCE)

ABC	American-British Conversations(also known as BUS)
ADB	American-Dutch-British Conference
Adm.	Admiralty
AFC	Anglo-French Staff Conversations
<u>BNA</u>	<u>Brassey's Naval Annual</u>
Cab.	Cabinet

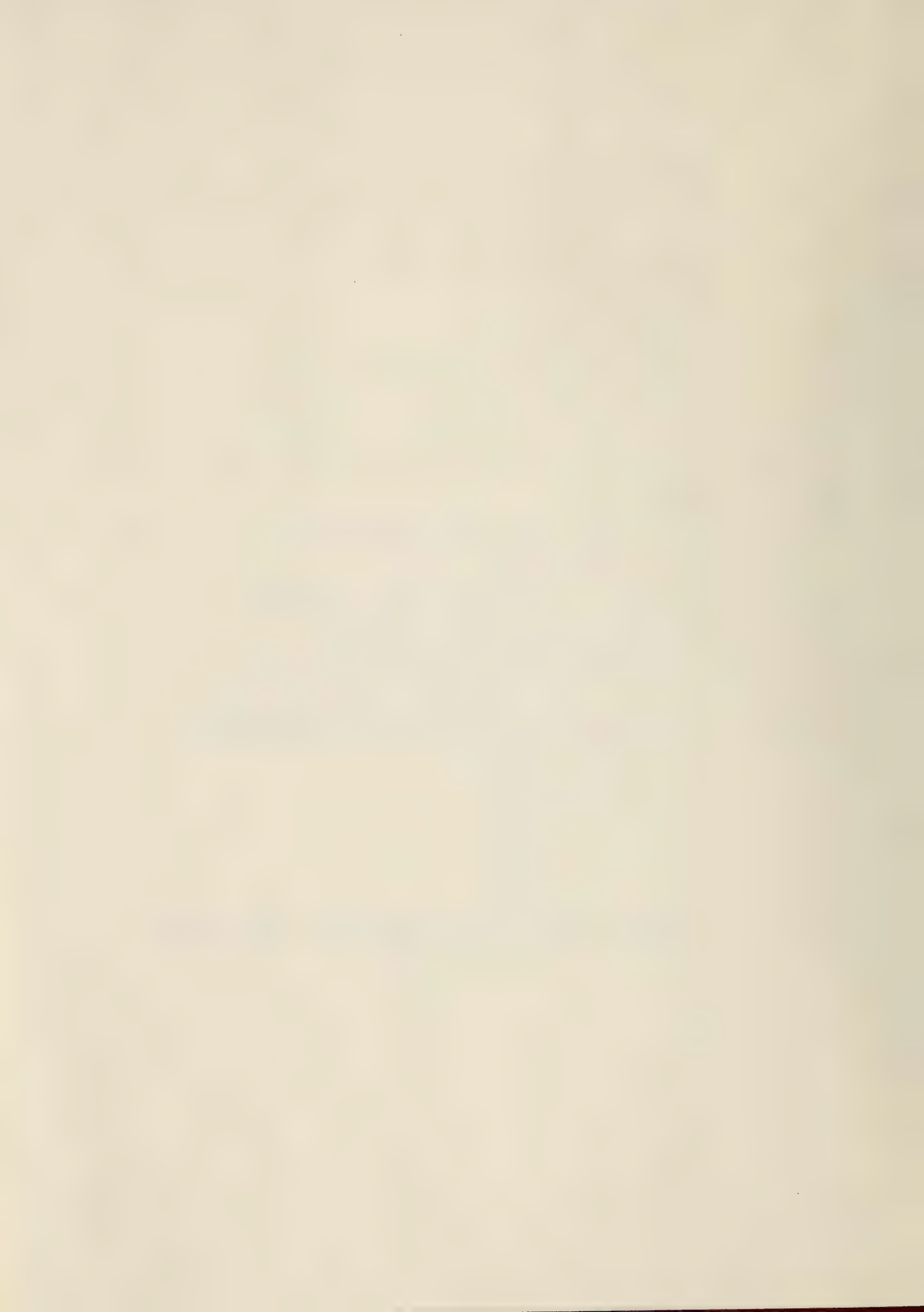


CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
<u>CH</u>	<u>Current History</u>
<u>CHR</u>	<u>Canadian Historical Review</u>
CO	Colonial Office
COS	Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee
COS(O)	Chiefs of Staff (Operational)
CP	Cabinet Paper
D Br.FP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
D(38)	Defence Programmes, an Acceleration Committee
DC(M)32	Ministerial Committee on Defence Requirements; Disarmament Conference
DO	Defence Committee, Operations
DP(P)	Defence Plans (Policy) Sub-Committee of CID
DPR	Defence Policy and Requirements Sub-Committee
DPR(DR)	Defence Policy and Requirements Sub-Committee; Defence Requirements
DRC	Defence Requirements Committee
<u>FA</u>	<u>Foreign Affairs</u>
FO	Foreign Office
<u>FR</u>	<u>Fortnightly Review</u>
IMT	International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg)
IWCTFE	International War Crimes Trial, Far East
<u>JRUSI</u>	<u>Journal Royal United Services Institute</u>





<u>LD</u>	<u>Literary Digest</u>
NC(M)	Ministerial Committee, Naval Conference, 1935
<u>19C</u>	<u>Nineteenth Century and After</u>
<u>NR</u>	<u>Naval Review</u>
<u>PA</u>	<u>Pacific Affairs</u>
PREM	Files of the Prime Minister's Office
PSO	Principal Supply Officers' Committee
PSO(SB)	Supply Board, Principal Supply Officers' Committee
<u>RT</u>	<u>Round Table</u>
SA	Standardization of Arms Committee (British-American)
SAC	Strategic Appreciation Sub Committee
<u>SIA</u>	<u>Survey of International Affairs</u>
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
<u>USNIP</u>	<u>United States Naval Institute Proceedings</u>
WM	War Cabinet Meeting
WP	War Cabinet Paper
WP(G)	War Cabinet General
WP(R)	War Cabinet Report
W.W.	Papers of the Arcadia Conference, Washington, December 1941/January 1942.





INTRODUCTION

Throughout the great area of the Pacific Ocean, the strategic conditions that faced the British Admiralty between the two World Wars were artificial. They were based on agreements which were kept by all signatory parties with the exception of Japan - the only power in the Pacific and the Far East which threatened to disturb the peace through military action. Japanese aggression may be said to date from 1895. In that year, at the conclusion of a successful war against China, Japan annexed Formosa, revealing her intention of establishing herself on the mainland. More than a generation was to pass before the fulfillment of this step in Japanese expansion. During that time, British relations with Japan were governed by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, negotiated in 1902 and renewed in 1905. It was re-affirmed in 1911, at the time when the decision was made to concentrate British naval strength in Home Waters to meet the growing naval threat from Germany.

At the end of the First World War, Japan's claims that her geographical position lent her special interests in China, together with her actions in Siberia, caused uneasiness in London, Washington and the Dominions. More importantly, it became clear that the Alliance was a possible source of friction with the United States. This caused Canada to oppose the renewal of the Alliance with great vigour at the Imperial Conference of 1921. Shortly thereafter, the Washington Naval Conference took place. This resulted in the substitution of a four-power treaty for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The treaty was signed by Great Britain, France, the United States and Japan.



More important for British naval strategy than the termination of the Alliance was the loss of a naval ally in the Pacific, at a time when the naval centre of gravity had shifted from the North Sea to the Far East. The problem the British now faced was how to defend her Far Eastern Empire. It became a cardinal point of British Far Eastern naval strategy to build and maintain a fleet base at Singapore. The Admiralty's reasons for the selection of Singapore as the major fleet base centred on the security of Australia and New Zealand and on British interests in the Indian Ocean. The protection of sea communications from the Far East to Europe required the maintenance of a naval base. The Admiralty view was that a fleet at Singapore was essential. Unfortunately, British Far Eastern naval strategy was only operative as long as there was no threat from Europe. With the rise of Hitler's Germany in 1933, Britain was faced with the same naval problem that had emerged prior to the First World War: fighting a two-ocean war with a one-ocean navy.

From 1935 on, British Far Eastern naval policy was the subject of considerable debate within various committees and at Cabinet level in London. The debate centred on the priority to be given the Far East. The question was whether the





defence of the Pacific should be ranked higher than the defence of the Mediterranean.

The inclusion of the French navy in British naval calculations at least provided some hope that should Japan attack, a British fleet could be dispatched to the Far East. With the fall of France in the summer of 1940 however, this hope was extinguished. With the British fighting for survival, and heavily committed in the Mediterranean, the Far East was relegated to the background. Nevertheless, the British had consistently promised the Pacific Dominions to provide for the naval defense of the Far East. The only hope was the United States. Like Japan prior to 1914, the United States would have to assume the responsibility of the defense of British interests in the Far East. The Americans proved unwilling to undertake this task. Therefore, the basic problem that the British consistently faced, which has a historical continuity going back to 1902, was how to defend two disparate parts of the Empire.

This basic problem of Empire has been inadequately dealt with in the literature. The preponderance of books and articles have been confined to analyzing the Fall of Singapore rather than examining the totality of British Far Eastern naval strategy, of which Singapore was but one part. The official histories, Roskill's The War at Sea, and Kirby's The



War Against Japan, Vol. I., only deal cursorily with the whole problem of British naval defense in the Far East, in that they do not relate the defense strategy to the problem of rearmament nor to the naval policies of allies. In addition the question of priorities to be given the Mediterranean vis à vis the Far East, is not detailed. The major unofficial works, such as Churchill's History of the Second World War, and Kirby's Singapore - the Chain of Disaster, Glover's In 70 Days, Crisp's Why We Lost Singapore, Morrison's Malayan Postscript, Simson's Too Little Too Late, and Thompson's Postmortem on Malaya, are just some of the many books that have dealt with what was the greatest disaster to befall British arms in modern times - the Fall of Singapore.

But none of these probe into history concerning the total strategic policy for the defense of the Far East, nor do they effectively treat the importance of the United States in British plans. Furthermore, they overlook the fact that the Americans had, to all intents, written off much of the Far East in terms of grand strategy. The Americans, with the exception of the Philippines and a few islands in the South Pacific, did not have a Far Eastern Empire which they were committed to defend. Although they had the potential resources to fight a two-ocean war, the Americans underestimated their capability to do so prior to 1941-42. Yet British writings on the subject, and





British policy-makers at the time, consistently believed that the United States could and would exert a decisive influence in the initial stages of a war with Japan.

In one sense, the British were correct. They had more faith in American potential than the Americans themselves did, but they mistakenly overrated American forces just before war broke out in the Pacific.

The literature on the British defeat in the Far East suggests that something might have been saved had not the local administration in Malaya been so complacent, had only a few more modern fighter aircraft, guns and tanks been sent out. Yet this underlines the basic problem of priorities. For the whole period under review, there were never enough men or equipment to go around. By necessity as well as by design, the Far East was third on the list of important theatres to supply. Naval strategy in the Far East could not be isolated from the overall deployment of British naval forces in other waters. The Battle of the Atlantic demanded a different type of fleet than the British possessed at the time. Long-range programmes for a two-power standard fleet, which the Defence Requirements



Committee ("DRC") proposed during the 1930's, were impossible to obtain due to financial limitations and lack of shipbuilding labour, yards, armament and gun-manufacturing facilities. When the financial restraints were lifted due to the demands of war, the necessity to repair and build merchant ships and to produce escort ships led to curtailment of the building programme for capital ships and carriers.

Naval war in the Atlantic demanded a different fleet from that required in the Pacific. The former needed small carriers, a vast array of escort ships, supported by heavy units to meet the German fleet. The latter required task forces with the emphasis on carriers and fleet trains. The British were simply unable to build and man two different fleets able to fight in the Far East, hold the Mediterranean, and contain the German navy in the Atlantic. The concept underlying the decision to send the ships East was based largely on British experience of German raiders in the Atlantic, roaming the seas and requiring large numbers of British heavy ships to track down and destroy them in ship-to-ship surface actions. The lessons of the Atlantic were applied to the Pacific with disastrous results.

Because this Thesis concentrates on naval strategy, a detailed examination of the diplomatic history of the period where it does not directly relate to the formulation of British naval strategy, has not been included. As will emerge,





however, British policy towards Japan was conditioned to some extent by the fact that the British could not maintain a fleet in the Far East until Singapore was ready. Unfortunately, when the base was finally opened in 1938, events in Europe had undermined the basic premise of British naval strategy. As Louis <sup>I</sup> makes clear, the British did not apply their policy of appeasement to Japan, for they maintained an anti-Japanese posture in China. This attitude, and the whole question of relations between Britain and Japan, was bitterly fought out in various sub-committees of the Committee of Imperial Defence ("CID").

Which theatre should have the highest priority in terms of strategic policy? Should Britain pursue a friendly policy with Japan, and accept the antagonism of the United States that such a policy would certainly create?

The importance of these debates and the decisions that flowed from them had a profound impact on British Far Eastern naval policy, not only in terms of deployment of the Fleet, but also in terms of the kind and size of fleet the British Government would pay for. These debates have a further significance, for it has been strongly argued by Capt. Malcolm Kennedy<sup>2</sup> that a positive policy of conciliation with Japan might have eliminated some of the gross misunderstandings between these two Powers. From the documents that have recently been released, it is difficult to see



how such a policy could have been maintained, particularly when the United States was adamantly opposed to it.

The Far Eastern policy required allies, and as World War II approached, the search for them intensified. The French were paramount in general strategy as their contribution on land was no less significant than the role of the French fleet in British naval calculations. With France as an ally, she could contain the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean, and give support against the Germans in the Atlantic. It would then be possible to send a British fleet to the Far East. When the French were eliminated from the war in June 1940, Britain found herself in the worst of all situations: fighting in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, with a threatening Japan in the Pacific. Fighting alone, Britain's resources were strained beyond the breaking point. Since the only nation that could tip the balance was the United States, it became a cardinal point of British diplomatic strategy to get the United States to restrain Japan by threats of intervention, or else to promise to commit American forces to the Far East should Japan attack. The other option was for the Americans to relieve sufficient British forces in the Atlantic, allowing the British to move a fleet to the Far East. This Anglo-American Alliance, as envisaged, would then replace the former Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Unfortunately, when it



came into operation on December 7, 1941, it was too late to save Britain's Far Eastern Empire, Singapore included.





INTRODUCTION

1. W.R. Louis, British Strategy In The Far East,  
Oxford, 1971.
2. Capt. Malcolm Kennedy, The Estrangement of Great  
Britain and Japan, 1917-1935; Manchester, 1969.



CHAPTER 1

THE GENESIS OF BRITISH NAVAL POLICY IN THE FAR EAST.

For ninety years before the First World War, the Royal Navy had not faced a major challenge. The fleet during that period had become a shadow of its former efficient self. Scattered about the world on various stations, the navy was a British presence, protecting British interests, transporting the army from one colonial trouble spot to another and guarding Britain's imperial communications. This situation allowed successive British governments to pursue a policy of "splendid isolation" - to remain aloof from Europe, secure in the knowledge that there was no naval power ready to throw down the gauntlet.

The vast trading network built up during the great days of British economic superiority of 1840-70 had convinced British navalists and statesmen of the vital necessity to protect sea communications. The role of the navy was cogently outlined by the Duke of Devonshire, then Chairman of the Defence Committee, in a speech to the Navy League on December 3, 1896:<sup>1</sup>

The maintenance of sea superiority has been assumed as the basis of Imperial Defence against attack from over the sea. This is the determining factor in the shaping of the whole defence policy of the Empire, and it is fully recognized by the Admiralty, who have accepted the responsibility of protecting British territory abroad against organized invasion from the sea.





Until World War II, therefore, it could be said that the unity and power of the British Empire depended chiefly on the might of the Royal Navy. This had the dual task of protecting the centre of the Empire, the United Kingdom, and maintaining her vital lines of communication with the Colonies, Dominions, and the rest of the world. Accordingly, the Royal Navy was equipped with an array of ships and personnel and strategically-placed bases from which to operate. The latter consideration had been, for hundreds of years, a prime element of British naval policy. When France posed the major threat to England, Henry VII established a royal dockyard at Southampton to offset the French bases at Honfleur and Cherbourg. When the naval challenge shifted to Holland, a British naval base was established on the east coast at Chatham. Later, during the Napoleonic era, when the French fleet was stationed on Brest, Devonport was converted into a British naval base. As trade expanded and new areas came under British control, or new trade routes developed, more links in the chain of naval and coaling stations were established.

During the nineteenth century, British possessions in the Far East increased in importance. As a result, more links were added to the chain: Simonstown at the Cape of Good Hope, Colombo in Ceylon, Freetown in Sierra Leone, Aden on the Red Sea, Malta and Cyprus in the Mediterranean, and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. Along with Gibraltar and



Alexandria, these allowed the British to control the two vital ocean routes to India: the short route via the Suez Canal after 1869, and the long route around the Cape.<sup>2</sup> Yet none of the Far Eastern stations was a first-class naval base, fully capable of repairing, refurbishing and offering well-protected sanctuary for a large fleet.

There was, moreover, a drawback which was not apparent until the advent of the Pacific war in 1941. Because the bases existed, the Royal Navy did not develop a fleet train which would have permitted ships to operate at a distance from them. In American terms, it became a "short-legged navy".<sup>3</sup>

Most of Britain's previous naval wars had been fought in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, where base facilities were close at hand.<sup>4</sup> A ship could cross the Atlantic and find facilities at Halifax at one end, and at Portsmouth or Londonderry at the other. In the early years of the twentieth century, the German Empire, seeking "a place in the sun", embarked on a large-scale naval construction programme. It seemed that the growing might of the German Navy might dispute, in time, Britain's control of sea routes, and isolate parts of the Empire from the centre. If the Empire was a source of Britain's strength, it was also its maritime Achilles' heel. The lines of sea communications were vulnerable to attack by a determined enemy.



The Royal Navy therefore needed to bottle up the main part of an enemy fleet and, at the same time, deploy sufficient force to protect the lines of Empire. But there were two lines of communications to be protected: the Atlantic and the Imperial routes to the East. The latter were more exposed, as the Cape route was open to attack from forces operating in the South Atlantic, while the Suez Canal could be blocked or the Mediterranean closed by an enemy fleet. Raiders in the Indian Ocean could wreak havoc on British merchant ships.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, the containment of a European fleet went back to the days of the wars with Spain, France and Holland. Because Europe was where power lay, there had been no logical need for the Navy to operate thousands of miles away from the United Kingdom. Whatever threat presented itself was confined to either the Mediterranean or the Atlantic. The result was that the Royal Navy never had to consider fighting a two-ocean war, nor was it ever designed or equipped to do so. Regardless of how the Admiralty might talk of global commitments, the reality was that these began and ended in the grey seas of the Atlantic or the mists of the North Sea.

As long as the Royal Navy was preparing to fight a European power in the Atlantic and the seas adjacent, it had an automatic advantage. It knew who the enemy would be: it knew his capabilities, and it knew where the battle would be joined. In terms of ship design and technology, it had to





match that of the European actual or potential enemy. If the potential adversary built big-gun ships, the Royal Navy would build big-gun ships, but more of them. This was sound policy, except that it often precluded British naval planners from considering other alternative weapon systems or alternate methods of employing them. The old, historically successful strategy was only viable as long as there was no other challenge to British sea power. In the early 1900's moreover, aside from Germany, two new naval powers emerged: the United States and Japan. The new technology of battleships, launched with the British Dreadnought in 1905, made it difficult if not impossible for Britain to provide the resources necessary for a two-ocean fleet.

This problem had already been underlined by the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty on November 8, 1901. By settling the problem of the Panama Canal in favour of the Americans, and by withdrawing her squadrons from the Caribbean, Britain acknowledged American hegemony in the western Atlantic.<sup>6</sup> It was in the Far East, however, that Britain's Empire was most vulnerable. The necessity to concentrate the Fleet in Home Waters to meet the German presence, would, in time, denude the British Far Eastern squadrons and leave the Pacific Dominions, together with India and Malaya, bare of naval protection. It was obvious that Britain required an ally. On January 30, 1902, she gained one with the signing of the (first) Anglo-Japanese Alliance.<sup>7</sup> The British



Admiralty was now able to concentrate the Fleet in home waters to meet a potential German threat.<sup>8</sup> The former obligation -- to maintain a Far Eastern fleet larger in size than any third power -- was being quietly downgraded. It was unlikely that the Admiralty would keep such large forces in the Far East, when their agreement to the Japanese Alliance was partially predicated on withdrawing Far Eastern naval forces to home waters.<sup>9</sup> The Admiralty correctly pointed out that a weak Royal Navy in European waters was open to defeat. And, if defeated, the Royal Navy would not be able to help Japan in the Far East. Japan, in turn, would then be exposed to a now superior, hostile European power who could send ships to the Far East without hindrance.

As the ships of the Royal Navy were moving from their peace-time stations for deployment in a possible war with Germany, the outlying parts of the Empire began to worry about their defences.<sup>10</sup> The Australians and New Zealanders saw themselves as particularly exposed. In 1906 the Australians had been informed that the Admiralty would prevent any major invasion of Australian territory in which the number of enemy troops was over 1,000 men.<sup>11</sup> Three years later the Australians asked if this commitment was still valid, because of the recent concentration of the Royal Navy in home waters.<sup>12</sup>

In a memorandum concerning the defence of the Pacific Colonies, the C.D.C. referred to the commitment made in 1896: "The maintenance of sea superiority has been assumed as the





basis of the system of Imperial Defence against attack from the sea."<sup>13</sup> While accepting this heavy responsibility, the Admiralty also claimed:

the absolute power of disposing of their forces in the manner they consider most certain to secure success<sup>14</sup>

They strongly objected to any limitation of this power particularly if it meant stationing ships in " the immediate neighbourhood of places which they consider may be more effectively protected by operations at a distance." <sup>15</sup>

The strategic deployment of the fleet therefore had to be determined by the requirements of war. For the Pacific Dominions, the C.D.C. memo contained a distant warning:

Although ... the responsibility for the protection of all British territory against organized invasion ... has been accepted by the Admiralty, the immediate presence of superior British naval forces in all waters where the enemy's ships may be found is not necessarily implied.<sup>16</sup>

The Admiralty was no longer able to put to sea a fleet equal to any possible hostile combination. But as long as the Royal Navy remained in being and intact, an enemy would not be able to maintain his overseas expeditionary force. He could not be certain of any victory overseas while the British fleet was still able to cut his lines of communication.

How long each portion of the Empire would have to hold out, and the scale of attack each might have to resist, was



not specified except in general terms. <sup>17</sup> The C.I.D. estimated in 1909 that Japan was the one nation with bases, fleet and army strength enough to launch a major attack against Australia. With an army of 19 combat-ready divisions, each of 20,000 men, together with reserves, Japan could put over a million soldiers into the field. In surveying this possibility, the C.I.D. outlined a scenario that was to become all too real at a later date:

It must be assumed that at the outbreak of hostilities, the local command of the Pacific might for a brief period rest with Japan, until such time as British naval reinforcements could arrive from European waters; during that period it would no doubt be possible for Japan to convoy to Australia <sup>18</sup> a military force of considerable size.

This was unpleasant information for the Australians to swallow. But in summary, the C.I.D. was somewhat more sanguine: "(the) size of any force the Japanese could transport against Australia will be limited by the constraints that such an operation must be brought to a successful conclusion before the Royal Navy could arrive."<sup>19</sup> It was therefore the opinion of the C.I.D. that the scale of attack that Australia needed to consider was the same as that outlined in 1906: small enemy raids and excursions, but no major invasion.

It was not only the Australians who were worried. The



Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy's China station, Vice-Admiral the Hon. Sir Hedworth Lambton, expressed his concern to the Governor of Hong Kong in a letter dated November 1908.<sup>21</sup> "European politics," wrote the Admiral, "is obviously necessitating the retention of the great bulk of our naval forces in Home Waters, thus leaving Japan supreme at sea." Lambton insisted that Britain's former naval superiority in Asian waters had gone forever, and that she would now have to be content with the status of a third-rate naval power in the Far East. When the C.D.C. received Sir Hedworth's letter in London, they reported that it "raised issues that materially effect the strategic principles of the system of Imperial Defence as it is now based."<sup>22</sup> They pointed out that Imperial Defence had been based on the Royal Navy's superiority over that of any combination of forces likely to be pitted against the United Kingdom.<sup>23</sup> This commitment must now be examined in the light of the changed circumstances due to the rise of German naval power. They prophesied the situation that became a reality 33 years later: the inability of the Royal Navy to manage successfully a two-ocean war.

In a report entitled "Standard of Defences at British Defended Ports in Distant Seas"<sup>24</sup> the point was made that the existence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

has relieved the Admiralty from the necessity to re-establish our naval superiority in the Far East over any probable combination of powers ... So long as the Alliance





remains operative ... the risk of attack by Japan on British territory(ies) ~~is excluded~~ from the category of reasonable probabilities to be provided against ....

But the Alliance could be terminated in 1915. If it was fundamental changes in Britain's naval position in the Far East would follow. At such a time,

not only will it no longer be possible to assume that the Japanese Fleet will be acting in concert with the British Navy in time of war, but the possibility of Japan being ranged against us, either alone or in combination with some other naval power, must be taken into consideration.<sup>25</sup>

The memo was a frank admission that Britain could not protect her Far Eastern Empire, and that European considerations demanded first priority in British Naval strategy. The C.D.C. also noted that should Germany and Japan be in alliance, Germany could well tie down the Royal Navy in the North Sea and the Atlantic, allowing the Japanese to buccaneer her way across the Pacific.

It was thus conceivable that at the outbreak of war, the naval situation in European waters might not permit the immediate dispatch to the Far East of British naval forces superior to those of Japan. Consequently, British possessions in those waters might for a time be exposed to the danger of attack by a formidable expeditionary force.

Having outlined the issues involved in the naval defence in the Far East, and having cast serious doubts on the Navy's ability to adhere to its former promise to protect the Empire from attack by sea, the C.D.C. asked if the guarantee of the Admiralty to secure British territory against invasion from



the sea was still to be regarded as the basis of the system of Imperial Defence in all parts of the world.<sup>26</sup>

In some anger, Admiral A.E. Bethell, Director of Naval Intelligence, replied<sup>27</sup> that "The memo appears to be based on the assumption that the Admiralty will not be able to fulfill their guarantee to protect British territory against invasion from the sea." He was not prepared to admit this.

The Admiralty view carried the day. The C.I.D.'s Memorandum came to the conclusion that "so long as the Alliance remains in force, British possessions in the Far East are secure. However, care should be taken to reinforce the fleet in the Far East before the termination of the Alliance in order to neutralize the danger from a predominant Japanese Fleet in the China Seas."<sup>28</sup>

In the years prior to the First World War, the Far Eastern naval situation was reviewed by various committees of the C.I.D., discussed at the Imperial Conference of 1911, and again outlined in 1913.<sup>29</sup> Little was added to the already voluminous appreciations dealing with British Naval policy and the Japanese Alliance.<sup>30</sup> Again and again, the point was made that if Britain were defeated in Home Waters, the Empire and its security would vanish in the smoke and debris of the last lost battle.

This principle had not been questioned by the Dominions, who had already agreed to place their navies under Admiralty orders in time of war. What they wanted was reassurance that





they would not be sacrificed on the altar of European interests. The New Zealanders, although the most loyal of the Dominions and the most pragmatic in their approach to Imperial Defence, still wished to know what would happen if the Alliance were terminated and the Royal Navy were locked up in Home Waters. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, explained that:

the groupings of the Great Powers depended on factors that changed slowly. If, however, Japan suddenly reversed her policy, and became hostile to the British Empire, it could not but react on all the powers with interests in the Pacific, and this reaction would tend to redress the balance, and thus lessen the danger to New Zealand or Australia. The actual danger to Australia or New Zealand from Japan would undoubtedly cause great concern to the United States of America, but apart from that, if the conditions postulated above arose, the United Kingdom itself, would undoubtedly make naval provision against it, and reinforce its China Seas Squadron to the full extent required.<sup>31</sup>

This posture Churchill was to assume again in 1940 as Prime Minister. His statement referred to the role the United States might take in defending British interests in the Pacific. The implication was that the United States might be a British ally in a war with Japan. In the end, Churchill's assumption proved to be the case. For the New Zealanders, however, it was a tenuous form of security for the defence of the Empire.<sup>32</sup>

In 1917, during the most grim days of the First World War, an Imperial Conference was convened in London.<sup>33</sup>



Its purpose was to gain greater participation for the Dominions in the Empire's affairs, and to allay their fears about the mis-management of the war. Little time, however, was spent discussing the war: that business was left to the Imperial War Cabinet, which met every other day in London. The Pacific Dominions' worry was still what it had always been: naval defence in their area, which they felt would be the next major arena of conflict. They wanted to know the Admiralty's ideas for naval defence after the war. One thing was certain, neither Australia nor New Zealand wished to rely upon the goodwill of Japan or the U.S.A. for their defence. What they wanted was a strong British naval presence in the Pacific, based on suitable naval bases. The Admiralty could only promise to examine the whole problem at the end of the war, and then produce a scheme for the defence of the Pacific Region.

Once the Peace treaties had been signed, a major issue facing the British Cabinet was the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Canada, and to a lesser extent South Africa were against renewal; Australia and New Zealand were for it. The Cabinet's view was that since Japan had remained "loyal to the Allies despite all temptations during the war," the Alliance should be continued.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, one other problem of Imperial Naval Defence had yet to be resolved. One step had been taken. The suggestion made at the Imperial War Conference of 1917 that



a senior British naval officer be sent to the Dominions to advise on naval matters had been accepted. The job was offered to Lord Jellicoe, who was instructed to "provide recommendations for the promotion of uniformity in naval organization, training and types of naval material throughout the Empire to insure efficient naval co-operation.<sup>35</sup>

On February 21, 1919, Jellicoe left England on board the battle cruiser New Zealand. He arrived in India on March 14, at the start of an 18-month tour of India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Six weeks later he sailed for Australia, where he examined various ports and outlying islands. He had received few specific directions concerning Pacific strategy, so he took it upon himself to devise his own plan for submission to London. In so doing, he proved to be a strategist of no mean account.

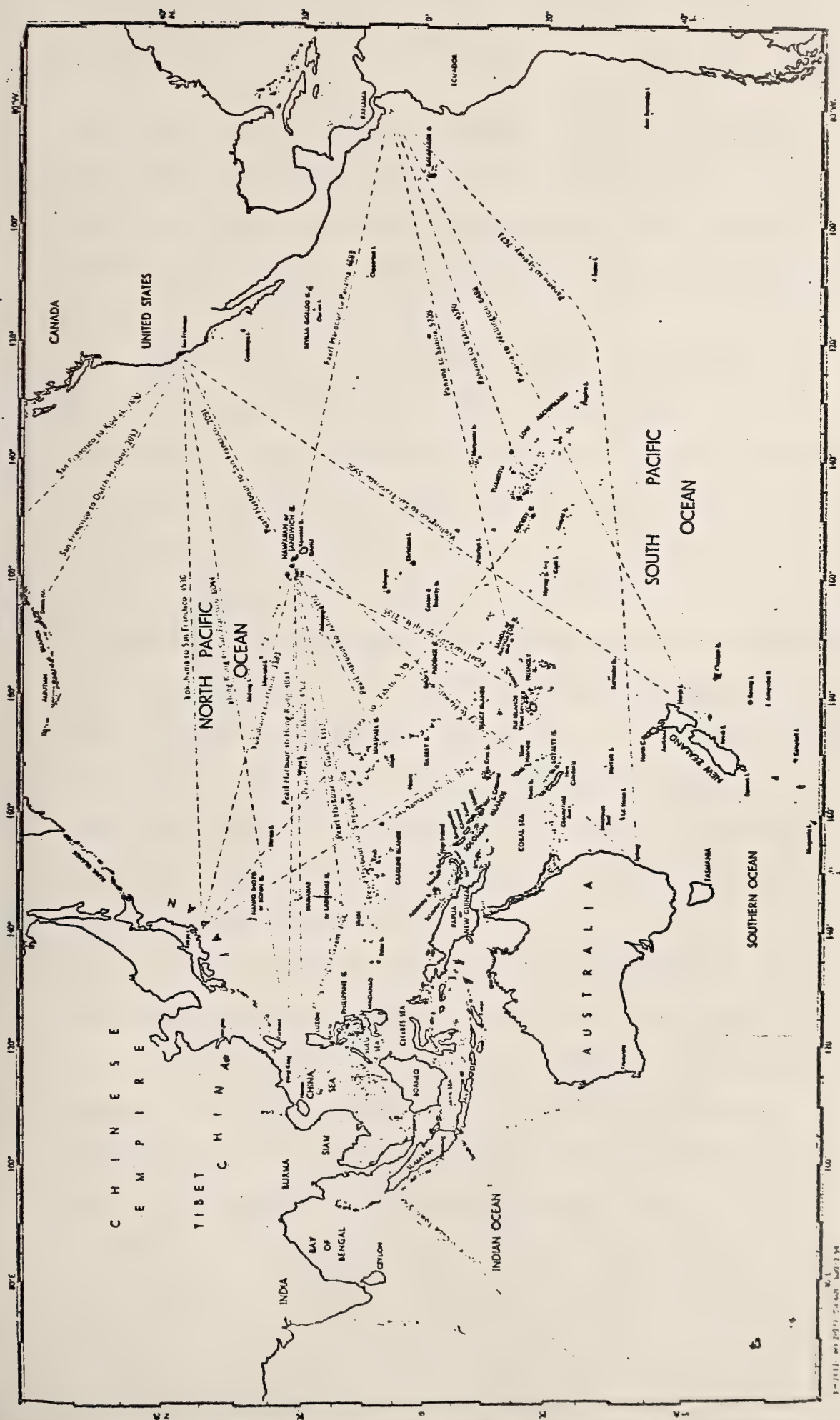
He came to the conclusion that due to the friendly relations existing between the United States and Great Britain, the Americans could be ruled out as potential enemies. But if they were not to be considered as enemies, neither could they be counted on to aid the British Empire with armed forces if a conflict broke out between Great Britain and Japan.<sup>36</sup> To Jellicoe, Japan was the long-term potential foe.<sup>37</sup>

Jellicoe noted that, in order to provide sufficient naval strength, what was needed in the Pacific was an integrated fleet of eight battleships of the Dreadnought class,





MAP I.





eight modern battleships, 10 light cruisers, 40 modern destroyers, three flotilla leaders, two depot ships, 36 submarines, four submarine supply ships, four aircraft carriers, 12 fleet merchant ships and two fleet repair ships.<sup>38</sup>

Jellicoe then suggested that this armada should be provided by Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand in proportion to their population and trade ... or, in round percentage figures, Great Britain 75%, Australia 20% and New Zealand 5%.<sup>39</sup>

He then turned his attention to command and matters of strategy. He suggested that the fleet should be headed by a British Admiral stationed at Singapore, because due to the great distances between Britain and the Far East there would be a delay in issuing instructions. Since local knowledge of the situation was vital to correct decision, the Admiral Commanding should be ashore with a strong command-structure.<sup>40</sup>

Jellicoe insisted that there must be a first class naval base in the Far East: "There is a very urgent necessity for the establishment of a dock at Singapore large enough to take any modern ship. It might be needed as a floating dock."<sup>41</sup> There should be fuel oil storage for the fleet, in excess of the current storage capacity of 86,887 tons. And, "although it is a fact that we are





in alliance with Japan at the present time, it would be very unwise to trust solely to this alliance and not take steps for naval defence."<sup>42</sup>

Britain had therefore to place a strong fleet in the Far East and increase its size in relation to any increase in Japanese naval strength. To do so immediately would mean stripping the Mediterranean and home waters, leaving little margin for safety. But so long as Italy and France were allies, Jellicoe did not see this a major problem.

Having made clear the vital necessity for a naval base in the Far East, Jellicoe then looked at the strategic situation from the vantage point of Japan and Great Britain. In the case of the former, he stated that

placing oneself in the position of a Japanese strategist, the first objective on the outbreak of hostilities with the British Empire would seem undoubtedly to be an attack on her naval bases if weakly held, since if captured or even rendered useless, the power of the British navy would be very largely strangled, and Japan could pursue any desired policy of invasion or of trade destruction.<sup>43</sup>

Approaching the situation from the British view, Jellicoe entered the grey land of prophesy, and while the future unfolded a different tale, the scenario he suggested was close enough to the final mark.

That either owing to complications at home or the sudden nature of the attack, the United Kingdom has not been able to dispatch any naval forces to reinforce the Far Eastern fleet before the outbreak of war.

That Japan's final aim is the invasion of



Australia, an earlier stage being possibly the occupation, for use as advanced bases, of some of the harbours of New Guinea, the Pacific Islands to the westward of New Guinea, or the use of harbours in some of the islands of the Dutch East Indies either with or without the consent of Holland.

That prior to or concurrently with the occupation of bases in the islands, Japan sends strong expeditions against our principal naval bases such as Singapore, Hong Kong or naval bases in Australia itself. This operation could be carried out successfully if these bases are weakly held. <sup>44</sup>

He believed these operations were feasible, as his information suggested that Japan could transport 100,000 fully-equipped men plus artillery in one convoy. Such a force could seize Singapore and bases in West Australia, thus paralyzing the ability of the Royal Navy to operate. To counter this threat a strongly-defended Singapore was needed to accommodate the fleet, and to stop Japan moving south. <sup>45</sup>

In September 1919, while Jellicoe was still on his mission, the Admiralty was considering a lengthy paper by the Naval Staff on Imperial Defence, <sup>46</sup> which it sent to the C.I.D. for consideration. In this document, the Admiralty recommended officially, for the first time, that in preparation for a possible war with Japan, a major naval base should be established at either Sydney in Australia or at Singapore. <sup>47</sup>



They thought it unlikely, in view of the days of economy ahead and the rapidly increasing strength of Japan, that Britain would be able to maintain a fleet equal to Japan's in the Far East in peace time.

The worst situation would be<sup>48</sup> with our squadrons scattered and with certain ships in reserve commission and bearing in mind the difficulty of moving a considerable fleet with all its supplies and auxiliaries, it is possible that a period of three months might elapse before our naval superiority in the Far East could be established.

In such a situation the course of action to be followed was that ships already in Eastern waters should assemble at the main fleet base, where they would join up with the forces arriving from European waters. The main fleet base was to be Singapore, as the port was sufficiently far from any Japanese possession to make an attack upon it in force improbable during the period before the main fleet arrived.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the problem involved both the strength of the fleet and the time needed to reinforce it.<sup>50</sup> But, how to buy time until the main fleet moved East? The answer was to secure a fleet base south of Hong Kong, "and no more suitable position can be suggested than Singapore".<sup>51</sup> Hong Kong was to be used only as a base for submarines. In addition, since the fleet would frequently have to operate at great distances from its primary bases, a mobile organization for the equipment of temporary fleet anchorages was essential, as was a generous





allowance of seagoing fuel and depot ships. 52

The Admiralty wanted to have a fleet of sufficient size, with all the ancillaries necessary to meet the Imperial Japanese fleet, and to wrest the command of the sea from it. This could only be done as long as Singapore remained intact, able to receive the main British fleet. With that fleet there, Japan could not extend her communications southwards.

In summary, the basis of British strategy was twofold: a fleet, and a fleet base. If one went, the whole was lost.

The Singapore concept was complicated by a variety of factors. Among these were the renewal or non-renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance; the increasing tightening of the financial screws by the Treasury; the overall position of British sea power in relation to both Japan and the United States, and finally, the Dominion pressure, especially from Australia,<sup>53</sup> which was anxious about Japanese moves southward into the German islands in the Central Pacific.<sup>54</sup> Australia wanted to know just what British naval policy was to be,<sup>55</sup> and how much of the Jellicoe Report the United Kingdom Government were going to accept.

In the decade before the First World War, the limits of British Naval Power had been established, the



fundamental problems concerning the Naval Defence of the Far East had been outlined, and the basic strategy had been formulated. Between the two world wars, little changed absolutely, although certain new elements were introduced, such as the establishment of a major naval base at Singapore. But the basic problem remained, never to be resolved until the United States entered the Second World War in 1941. The ensuing story shows how the Admiralty and successive British governments attempted to adjust to the naval reality; while attempting both to provide some visible defence for the Pacific Dominions and the Empire in the Far East, and to cope with a new threat from Germany.





FOOTNOTES

1. C.D.C. memo 57-M, 19/5/1896, Cab. 8/1, also General Principles affecting the Overseas Dominions and Colonies, C.D.C. memo 417, 7/7/10, Cab. 8/1, and C.I.D. 62-C, 4/7/12 Cab. 2/2/3. See also note by the First Sea Lord, C.P. 100 (31) 14/4/31.
2. For a discussion of naval bases, see Col. A.M. Murray, Imperial Outposts, London, 1907, and "Strategic Colonies and Their Future", Fabian Papers, London, 1945, Rear Admiral H.J.S. Brownrigg, "Naval Bases in relation to Empire Defence", JRUSI, Vol. 77, (Feb., 1932), Capt. C.J.C. Little, R.N., "Naval Bases and Sea Power", JRUSI, Vol. 74, (Feb., 1929). A. Marder, The Anatomy of British Sea Power, N.Y., 1940. For the acquisition of naval bases and areas in Africa to protect the sea routes to India, see R. Robinson, J. Gallagher, A. Denny, Africa and the Victorians, London, 1961.
3. Rear Admiral S.E. Morison, American Contribution to the Strategy of World War II, N.Y., 1958.
4. D. Macintyre, "Operations in the Indian Ocean" in P. Kemp ed, History of the Royal Navy, London, 1969, P. 288.  
This is not to say the Admiralty were completely unaware of the Fleet Train or mobile base concept. As early as 1920, a scheme was prepared by the Naval Staff for Mobile Bases Organization, "Scheme for a Mobile Naval Base Organization", August, 1920, Adm. 1/8564. However, it did not receive high priority, and the Admiralty always assumed Singapore would be available. See S. Roskill, The War at Sea, Vol. III, Pt. II, London, 1961, Appendix P, also pp. 329-335. See also P. Smith, Task Force 57, the British Pacific Fleet, 1944-45, London, 1969.
5. Captain Von Waldeyer-Hartz, Naval Warfare of Tomorrow, Berlin, 1936, E.E. Kruse, Modern Naval Strategy, Berlin, 1938. H. Rosinski, "German Theories of Sea Warfare", Brassey's Naval Annual, 1940., Admiral Tirpitz, My Memoirs, N.Y., 1919, Vol. 1.



6. G.S. Graham, The Politics of Naval Supremacy, Cambridge, 1964, pp. 3, 5, and 29.
7. For the story of Anglo-Japanese relations and the background to the Alliance, see I.H. Nish, The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, London, 1966, also Peter Lowe, "The British Empire and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", History, Vol. LIV, 1969. Also, A. Marder, The Anatomy of British Sea Power, Op. Cit. Chaps. XXI, XXIII, C.N. Spinks, "The Background of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", PHR, Vol. II (1939). For British Naval views of the Alliance, see "The Future of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Naval Aspects of the Question", Admiralty Memo, 10/4/05, Cab. 4/1.
8. Admiralty Memo, 12/12/05, C.I.D. 70-B Cab. 4/2.
9. Admiralty Memo re Treaty, 29/9/05, Cab. 17/7/06, and Memo, 10/4/05, Cab. 4/1.
10. One of the worrying factors concerning the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was the possibility of a 'Race War' between the U.S.A. and Japan which would find Canada and Australia aligned with the Americans, while Britain was allied with Japan. Lord Esher raised this point in a memo of January 21, 1910, Cab. 4/3/1, also letter A. Balfour to Lord Esher, February 4, 1910, Balfour Papers, 79719. British Museum (hereafter BM).
11. C.I.D. Memo, Australia, Scale of Attack, C.I.D., 362-M, 15/4/06, Cab. 5/2/1.
12. G.G. of Australia, to C.O., 15/9/09, Australia Scale of Attack, C.I.D. 64-C, 7/7/1910, Cab. 5/2/2.
13. C.D.C. Memo, 57-M, 19/5/1896, Cab. 8/1.
14. C.I.D. Memo, 64-C, Op. Cit.
15. Ibid.
16. General Principles Affecting the Overseas Dominions and Colonies, C.D.C. 4/7, 7/7/10, Cab. 8/1.
17. Australia, Scale of Attack, C.I.D. 64-C, 7/7/10, Cab. 8/2/2. This paper refers to C.D.C. 417-M of the same date, and to C.I.D. 362-M of 15/4/06.



18. C.I.D. 64-C, Op. Cit.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Letter to Gov. of Hong Kong, 25/11/08, Cab. 8/5/1.
22. C.D.C. Memo 405-M, 7/4/09, Cab. 8/5/1.
23. C.D.C. 405-M Op. Cit., and C.I.D. Memo 348-M, 7/11/05, Cab. 8/5/1.
24. C.D.C. 405-M Op. Cit.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Addendum to C.D.C. Memo 405-M, 7/4/09, by C.I.D. 29/6/09, Cab. 8/5/1.
29. See The Strategic Situation in the Event of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Being Terminated, C.I.D. 78-C, 3/5/11. Cab. 5/2/2, also General Principles Affecting the Overseas Dominions and Colonies, C.I.D. 417, 7/7/10, Cab. 8/1, Australia, Scale of Attack, C.I.D. 64-C, 7/7/10, Cab. 5/2/2, Report of the Sub-Committee Assigned to Formulate Questions Connected with the Naval and Military Defence of the Empire to be Discussed at the Imperial Conference of 1911, C.I.D. 67-C, 11/3/11, Cab. 5/2/2.
30. See for example C.I.D. 99-C, 5/4/13, which refers in turn to C.I.D. 442-M of 3/5/11, in Cab. 2/2/3.
31. Meeting of the C.I.D. with the New Zealand Representative in Attendance, 11/4/13, Cab. 2/2/3.
32. Ibid. See also Memo on Imperial Navy Policy, C.I.D. 102-C, 13/4/13. For the story of Dominion Imperial Naval Relations, see Cab. 5/3/2, 2/1, 2/2/3, 1/8.
33. Imperial War Conference, 1917, Cab. 32/1. Australia was not represented at the Conference, but the Pacific





Dominions' view was ably put by W.F. Massey, Prime minister of New Zealand and his Minister of Finance, Joseph Ward.

34. War Cab. 8/7/19, A.C.P. Case 34. But there was a growing distrust of Japan in certain British Government circles - see Lord Balfour to Sir. E. Carson, First Lord, 7/4/7, B.P. 49714, also Jellicoe Papers (hereafter J.P.), Vol. IV 40051. Military attache to Tokyo, to D.M.I., 13/12/17, Cab. 25/48, also Robert Cecil Papers, (hereafter R.C.P.), extracts from War Cab. Minutes Nov. 1917, R.C.P. No. 51103. Lord R. Cecil was Minister of Blockade, and U.S. of State for Foreign Affairs. In 1918, he became Assistant U.S. of State for Foreign Affairs. In 1916, the India Office presented a lengthy memo in which was stated that Japan's "natural design is to dominate the East", and that at the end of the war, Japan would emerge strengthened, while the other powers would be exhausted. The memo continued on this vein, and included a statement that Japan would use the vehicle of "race" to undermine British Indian relations and British rule in India. Examples of Indian agitators being trained in Japan were cited, and it was claimed that certain Japanese were linked to the inner councils of the Indian nationalist movement. There were also fears expressed concerning Japanese economic penetration of India. The memo concluded that Japan was not tied to Britain by anything save hard self-interest and her adherence to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would only last as long as it served Japanese interests. The question the memo posed was - where would Japan expand? In the north west, Russia blocked her; in the south, lay the Dutch East Indies. Japanese expansion into the area could not be tolerated by H.M.G. That left only the China mainland. As long as it did not come into conflict with the British interests in south China, perhaps this was a solution to the Japanese problem. India Office Memo, 16/5/16 in A.C.P. Case 21. The Memo also contained a memo from the Foreign and Political Department which quoted from a Japanese newspaper, the Yamato Shimbun of Dec., 1915, that Japan wanted full equality with the United Kingdom in China and the Yangtse Valley; that Japan be allowed to trade without hindrance in India and the southern regions of east Asia; that full equality be accorded to Japanese citizens in Australia, Canada, Africa, India and other self-governing dominions; and that there should be no exclusion based on race; that Japan should not be responsible for the defence of India (where she had no interests); and finally, Article 4 must be changed to define the offensive-defensive provisions. Government of India Foreign and Political Dept. No. 15, 14/4/16 in A.C.P. Case 21.



35. Adm. Memo 29163, 23/12/18, J.P. No. 49045. For his instructions, see Adm. Letter 23/12/18, Ibid.
36. Jellicoe to Adm. 3/2/20, 68/P3, J.P. Vol. III, Australia 49051.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid. Similar recommendations had been made as early as 1913, at the Imperial Conference by Sir James Allen, N.Z. Minister of Defence. See Sir James Allen, New Zealand and Naval Defence, N.P., 1929, P. 7.
40. Ibid., Vol. II, J.P. 49049.
41. Ibid., Vol. IV, J.P. 49051.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid. Jellicoe also reiterated his Singapore concept. See Vol. II, J.P. 49051, Canada Vol. III, J.P. 49056, New Zealand, J.P. 49052.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Board Minute, 25/9/19, Adm. 167/56 and 1/8571.
47. Adm. 1/8751 and 116/1803. The concept of Singapore as a major naval base was not new. Prior to the First World War, Lambton had stressed the fact that Hong Kong was unsuitable as a fleet base, and Singapore had been mentioned as an alternative. In 1899, Austen Chamberlain, then Civil Lord of the Admiralty, had pointed out the strategic site of Singapore and recommended that an Admiralty dock be constructed, as at that time it was only a second class naval station. Memo 1/7/1899, A.C.P. Case 34. For some insight concerning the Sydney versus Singapore argument see G.H. Gill, The Royal Australian Navy 1939-42, Canberra, 1957, pp. 15 ff., also Col. C. Repington, "Singapore or Sydney", Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 114 (Sept. 1923) and Capt. R. J. Wilkinson, R.N. "Singapore", JRUSI, Vol. 69 (Nov. 1924), see also C.I.D. 102nd meeting 29/6/09, Cab. 2/3.
48. Adm. 1/8751, Op. Cit.





- 49. Ibid.
- 50. Ibid.
- 51. Ibid.
- 52. Ibid.
- 53. Prime Minister William Hughes of Australia had been touring the United States making speeches which implied that Japan was a potential enemy in the Pacific. Speech quoted along with Japanese press comments in C.O. 418/182. Hughes also was trying to enlist the Americans to help underwrite Australia's security, predating the ANZUS Pact by 36 Years. Tele. Lord Reading to Balfour, 2/6/18 in B.P. 49741 and Hughes was also attempting to get the Admiralty to station a Fleet in Australian waters. See C.O. 418/182 and Tele. G.G. to C.O. 15/10/19 Cab. 23/12.
- 54. Tele. G.G. to S.S.C., 8 and 12/7/20, C.O. 418/196.
- 55. G.G. to S.S.C., 3/7/20, Cab. 21/188.



## CHAPTER II

### POLICY - SHIPS, SINGAPORE AND THE TEN YEAR RULE

The extent to which the Admiralty was prepared to accept the Jellicoe report and their readiness to implement their own plans for Far Eastern Defence, depended on the willingness of successive governments to provide funds for the navy. They were never able to extricate themselves from this predicament.

Twelve days after the armistice was signed, a letter was sent by Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to the First Lord of the Admiralty, urging him to cut down naval expenditure at once.<sup>1</sup> A month later, the Treasury again told the Admiralty that no spending on ships or warlike stores was to be undertaken without their full approval.<sup>2</sup> The days of unlimited war-time spending had ended.

Meanwhile, Walter Long, the First Lord, submitted his estimates for the financial year 1920-21. The amount he asked for was £171 million. This was too much for the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. In a memo submitted to the War Cabinet on July 8, 1919, Austen Chamberlain noted that the Admiralty wanted a fleet equal to the fleet that was built to meet the German menace. But who was it to fight? The German fleet had been sunk or was in captivity, Russia was racked by internal problems, France was an ally, and Italy was destitute. Only the



United States and Japan emerged from the war "with enhanced strength: and both are rather enigmatic in their attitude".

"Japan", Chamberlain wrote, "may be suspected by some to have ambitious designs in the Pacific, which in the long run will bring her into collision with this country." But apart from the difficulties of her relations with the United States of America and the improbability that she could go to war with Great Britain without bringing in the United States of America, it was unlikely that Japan would present a serious threat. After all, she had remained loyal "to the Alliance despite all the temptations during the war". Looking at the Admiralty's disposition of ships, Chamberlain noted that it placed none nearer to Japan than the Mediterranean: as for a coup de main by Japan, this could not be "anticipated by any fleet action, even under the intended Admiralty disposition of the fleet".

Chamberlain wanted economies made by the Admiralty: a reduction of the fleet from 21 full crew capital ships to 15, and reduced crews for six to eight capital ships, as well as an establishment of 100,000 men. The Navy was to be maintained at minimum strength for the next few years to save taxes.<sup>4</sup>

The serious nature of Britain's financial problem had also come to the notice of Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the Cabinet. On July 17, 1919, he wrote a paper to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, entitled "Towards a National Policy".<sup>5</sup> He stressed the urgent need to cut down service





expenditure and to pull put of overseas military commitments. Economies were required, and the fighting services were the most obvious places to start.

Shortly after, the Finance Committee of the War Cabinet chaired by Lloyd George, met on August 11, 1919. It suggested that the service estimates should be formed on the basis that there would not be a major war for a period of ten years.<sup>6</sup> The following day, Walter Long asked the Cabinet for guidelines on the future of British naval policy. Long was trying to determine how far Britain was prepared to go to ensure her naval supremacy over the United States, or any other combination of naval powers. He suggested that the only naval power against which British strength had to be measured was the United States. Japan was to be discounted, as she was an ally under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.<sup>7</sup>

Long also wanted to know the length of time during which Britain would not be faced with a conflict with a major power or a combination of minor powers which could match British strength at sea. Three days later the Navy got its answer. At 11:30 a.m. on August 15, 1919, the War Cabinet met and formulated the Ten Year Rule.<sup>8</sup> The pertinent decision was that the "Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry should work out their estimates on the following bases: It should be assumed in framing revised estimates that the British Empire will not be engaged in any Great War during the next 10 years ...". A month later the War Cabinet agreed that it was to



be assumed in framing the revised estimates that the British Empire would not be engaged in any Great War during the next 10 years.<sup>9</sup>

The Service estimates were therefore to have an upper limit for the financial year 1920-21. The Navy was to be allowed £60 million of the £171 million asked for by Long. The Army and Air Force were to share £75 million between them.<sup>10</sup>

The Ten Year Rule was not formulated on any expert review of the problems in international relations likely to arise over the next ten years. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Balfour, had not been present at either the Finance Committee meeting, or that of the War Cabinet on August 15.<sup>11</sup> Nor was he represented by the Permanent Undersecretary or his Parliamentary Secretary. Material was not presented to help guide the War Cabinet in its deliberations over the rule to govern the service estimates.

"This formula", wrote the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austen Chamberlain,<sup>12</sup> "is no more than a working hypothesis intended to relieve the Chiefs of Staff from their responsibility for preparing for contingencies which the government believed to be remote or beyond the financial capacity of the country to provide against."

When they formulated the Rule, the Cabinet ignored the prophetic advice which Sir Edward Grey, when Foreign Secretary,





had given to the Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1912. He had pointed out that foreign policy and naval strength were closely related:<sup>13</sup>

We arrange our Foreign Policy in alliance with our ship-building programme to make sure that we shall not have to face any combination which we could not face, either by ourselves or in combination with other powers friendly with us

The development of British policy in respect to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Naval Limitations Treaties must be evaluated against this background. Each fundamentally affected British Naval Policy; and much of the impetus for naval disarmament, the acceptance of the naval limitations in 1922, and subsequent British policy, derived from the fact of the Ten Year Rule.

Even while the Ten Year Rule was being formulated, an equally important debate was taking place. What type of fleet should Britain possess? The critical question revolved around the role of the battleship and the emergence of air power and aircraft carriers.<sup>14</sup>

The potentialities of naval air power were not well understood in the period immediately after the First World War. Air power had not then proved itself under war conditions against fast-moving ships sending up anti-aircraft fire. Thus the arguments used, while highly emotional, were largely theoretical.

However, warship design and technology had moved ahead



of aircraft development and design. Aircraft had still not evolved a technology equal in sophistication to fighting ships as weapon-systems. Hence, the role of aircraft carriers was an open-ended question. Attempts that had been made to use aircraft in the war at sea had proved failures. Air reconnaissance was tried at Jutland and failed, while air attack against German surface units had proved abortive. Air support of the navy's anti-submarine war had achieved a level of success, but had gone unrecognized.<sup>15</sup>

This process began in 1917 - a time when the war on the Western Front had reached a bloody stalemate. As Lloyd George surveyed the situation, he desperately sought a way to end the slaughter and win the war. He looked to air power as one means by which success might be achieved. In July, 1917, he appointed General Jan Smuts as a one-man committee to examine the development and role of air power.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of the Smuts' Committee report lay in its strong recommendation of the unification of all fighting air arms, under a separate Air Ministry. The report unfortunately appeared at a time when the Admiralty was in disarray, due to the dismissal of Jellicoe on Christmas Eve, 1917, and under heavy fire for its inability to cope with the submarine attacks in the Atlantic. No one therefore paid much attention to the Smuts report.<sup>17</sup> But on August 24, 1917, the Cabinet approved Smuts' recommendations and



on April 1, 1918, the Royal Air Force came into being. In January, 1919, Major-General Hugh Trenchard became the first Chief of the Air Staff.

It did not take long for the Navy to realize that its air interests were being neglected. The Admiralty, and in particular Beatty, had by 1918 gained a better understanding of the role of air power in the sea battle, but could not induce Trenchard to alter his doctrine of strategic air power.<sup>18</sup>

Trenchard fought tenaciously for his ideas, to the point where they became obsessions.<sup>19</sup> This led to endless inter-service bickering. During this, the one-time British technical superiority in aircraft, carriers and operational procedures was dissipated. Forced to spend its energies in fighting to regain control of the fleet air arm, the Admiralty neglected to study the deployment and role of naval air power. The big-gun - big-ship Admirals gained additional support for their cause as a result.

The acceptance of the battleship and battle-cruiser as the main line ships of the Royal Navy was in the long run a mistake, but it was a mistake made in good faith.

In coming to a rational conclusion on priorities, the navy was hindered by the emphasis placed on the battle of Jutland at the naval Staff College. The predominance of Jutland in naval thought, with its emphasis on the role of the big-gunned ship,<sup>20</sup> not only downgraded the importance of air power,





but relegated study of the submarine threat to the background.<sup>21</sup>

There was another aspect of the battleship question that is sometimes overlooked. Battleships possess a grandeur not found in any other type of weapons-system. They are "high profile" objects of power. Their long, sleek grey lines, with shining decks and long-barreled guns, represented the essence of British might and majesty. It was the battleship which gave succour to the overseas Dominions and impressed friend and foe alike.<sup>22</sup> They were a floating exhibition of the refinements of British technology. The battleship was indeed the long arm of British power. Only the navy could demonstrate it - only naval officers with their social training could illustrate it so well.<sup>23</sup> The battleship was to the Navy what the cavalry was to the army - the epitome of fighting grace and beauty. It was very human for officers of both services to fight to maintain what they perceived as the best of their respective services.

There was to be another chance for those who argued for the use of air power, the aircraft-carrier and the torpedo. In August 1919, a committee was established to examine the post-war questions with particular reference to the value and uses of different types of war vessels and the use of aircraft in attack and defence. Known as the Post-War Questions Committee, under the chairmanship of Vice-Admiral R.F. Phillimore, the proponents of air power might have felt that their chance had come. Phillimore had commanded the air



components of the Grand Fleet, and later, when he held the same post in the Atlantic Fleet, he sent the Admiralty a well-reasoned and far-sighted report on naval air power.<sup>24</sup>

Well-reasoned and far-sighted Phillimore's report might have been; but by itself, it could not overcome the one ongoing problem that every armed force carries within its organization: - that is a society in microcosm, whose structure is built around existing weapons-systems.<sup>25</sup>

In such a 'society', professional naval officers will naturally identify themselves and their prospects for promotion with a navy dominated by the modern version of the Dreadnought, in which they served as young midshipmen or newly commissioned sub-lieutenants. A dramatic change in the weapons-systems could well mean a restructuring of the hierarchy in which, for example, the officer who could understand aircraft and fly them might be jumped in rank over the officer whose whole career was in gunnery.

This 'human factor' was not one that could be easily changed, particularly when those who occupied high rank within the naval structure were in a position to defend a weapon-system in which they had a deep emotional and career interest.

In July 1920, the First Sea Lord Admiral Beatty took up the question of the size of the Royal Navy and future construction-programmes. He contended that if the Royal Navy was to be equal in strength to the next most powerful fleet, four capital ships were needed in 1921 and another four the





following year. He also emphasized the urgency of completing the aircraft carriers Eagle and Hermes and of converting the battle cruiser Furious into a carrier. The cost of this programme was estimated at £82 million over five years.<sup>26</sup> The Admiralty pointed out that unless such construction took place, the Navy would not have, with the exception of the Hood, any post-Jutland capital ships, while Japan would have finished four Kaga class battleships and four Akagi class battlecruisers.<sup>27</sup>

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, already somewhat disgruntled about the Admiralty's estimates, carried his attack on the programme into the House of Commons, telling the House that the serious financial condition of the nation compelled a full-scale examination of the whole issue of naval strength by a committee of the C.I.D.<sup>28</sup>

It did not take long for this committee to be formed. Consisting of Bonar Law (Lord Privy Seal) as Chairman, its members included Churchill (Secretary of State for War and Air), Long, Sir Robert Horne (President of the Board of Trade), Sir Eric Geddes, and Beatty. Officially constituted on December 7, 1920, the committee received two memoranda by Beatty arguing forcefully for the capital ships, and stating with some vehemence that there was no aircraft at that time which could seriously challenge the battleship with offensive weapons such as the torpedo. The battleship, stated Beatty, was and would continue to be the backbone of every navy in



the world for at least twenty years. This was strong stuff, and it suggested that the Admiralty had written off the aircraft carrier (and the submarine) for a long time to come.<sup>29</sup>

What was surprising was Churchill's strong advocacy of the battleship. He endorsed building four capital ships yearly for the next four or five years.<sup>30</sup> For a man who had helped formulate the Ten Year Rule, such advocacy seems a cogent example of his love-affair with the battleship<sup>31</sup> a love-affair which, compounded by an overemphasis on the capability of such ships,<sup>32</sup> led many years later to the dispatch of the ill-fated force to Singapore.

Churchill and Beatty with Long carried the day. The battleship mentality had emerged unscathed.

The end-result of such a policy was naturally unknown to the men who conceived it. Some cognizance had to be taken, however, of the fact that the battleship and its capabilities (even if overestimated) were a known variable. It had been built and tested in the harsh conditions of war. The officers of the Navy and many of the politicians had measured British sea-power by the number of battleships Britain possessed.<sup>33</sup>

That the decision was to a large extent a wrong one, does not negate the fact that if the carrier had proved a failure, then those who had opted for that type of warship could well have stood accused of incompetence at the least, and at the worst, of jeopardizing the safety of the Kingdom.

As Lord Chatfield, when First Sea Lord in 1936,



pointed out:

If we rebuild the battle fleet and spend many millions in doing so, and then war comes and the airmen are right, and all our battleships are rapidly destroyed by air attack, our money will have been largely thrown away. But if we do not rebuild it and war comes, and the airmen are wrong and our airmen cannot destroy the enemy's capital ships, and they are left to range with impunity on the world's oceans and destroy our convoys, then we shall lose the British Empire.<sup>34</sup>

This point is valid. It must be noted, however, that Chatfield like many of his fellow Admirals recognized the usefulness of aircraft carriers, but only in a limited role. As a member of the Chiefs of Staff in 1936, he noted that the "employment of carriers for striking and attacking trade cannot be ruled out", but, further,

their cost and vulnerability make it unlikely that they will be so used. Further, to maintain a carrier and a sufficient covering force of cruisers, for any time in the ocean where the enemy has superiority, would entail the provision of a supply organization about which it would be difficult to maintain sufficient secrecy.<sup>35</sup>

Aside from the question of what type of ships, there was the still unresolved problem of Imperial naval defence. In a policy paper of October 1919, the Admiralty stated that there might well be a period of three months before British naval superiority could be re-established in the Far East, should Japan go to war against the British Empire.<sup>36</sup>

The following year, on December 14, 1920, the C.I.D.





met, with the Prime Minister in the Chair.<sup>37</sup> The subject was Far Eastern Naval Policy and the Singapore naval base. The two expected issues emerged: British insolvency versus Admiralty demands. Financial restrictions had induced the Admiralty to accept the one-power standard- that is, a fleet equal to the next strongest naval power, in this case the United States. The demand by Beatty for a decision concerning the Singapore plan, and with it the development of a coherent policy for the naval defence of Britain's Far Eastern Empire, was spurred on by the approach of the next Imperial Conference. This was scheduled to start June 20, 1921.

In consequence, the Admiralty presented yet another lengthy, two-part memo,<sup>38</sup> "Empire Naval Policy and Co-operation",<sup>39</sup> They took for granted that Japan was the major potential enemy. Although they agreed that an American-Japanese conflict while Britain was allied with Japan was remote, they used this example to underscore the size and type of fleet that was required to insure maximum Imperial security: "an Empire navy capable of holding simultaneously the command of the seas both East and West".

A naval race with the United States<sup>40</sup> could well make this policy financially untenable (in fact it already was), and thus the Admiralty was beginning to hint that the cost of the Alliance was not now commensurate with its advantages.

It was not surprising that the strategic assessment seemed predicated on the end of the Alliance. Here the Admiralty reiterated what had been stated prior to 1914 and



by Jellicoe two years previously. "The worst situation with which the British Empire could be faced, from a naval point of view, would occur if Japan seized the opportunity of an aggressive action in the Pacific at a time when the situation at home was threatened from another quarter." In such a case the Admiralty warned that reinforcements capable of dealing with the whole of Japan's main forces could not immediately be spared. But as long as the British fleet was undefeated, the local superiority of the enemy would be of uncertain duration and liable to sudden extinction.

At a further meeting of the C.I.D. in May 1921,<sup>41</sup> the vital strategic importance of Singapore was strongly emphasized. In view of this, the Overseas Defence Committee (O.D.C.) was asked to consider and report on the defence and other measures required to develop the port as a naval base on the lines considered necessary by the Admiralty. The naval members of the O.D.C. were prepared. The previous day they had stated their own conviction that

the principal reasons for the Admiralty's desire that Singapore be developed as a naval stronghold is that at the present time there is no secure fleet base in the East in a good strategic position.<sup>42</sup>

Having accepted Singapore as the base, they outlined the measures necessary for its defence.<sup>43</sup> This had two phases: the period before the main fleet arrived from home waters and the Mediterranean, and the period after its arrival. During





the first period, the base would have to withstand an attack for six weeks.<sup>44</sup> It was assumed that the Japanese had local naval supremacy, and would be able to carry out a combined attack either to render the base useless or to capture it. The other alternative open to them was naval bombardment of vulnerable targets, blocking the entrance to the anchorage and minelaying the approaches. During the second period, when the fleet arrived, protection would still be required, especially against torpedo-attack by light surface craft and submarines. In the naval members' view, it was highly unlikely that any combined attack would be undertaken by the enemy, or continued once the fleet had arrived.<sup>45</sup> To ensure protection, both during period one and two, local defence forces of submarines and light craft, along with long-range guns, were required. They did not feel themselves competent to discuss a land attack until a combined naval and military reconnaissance of the south-east coast of Singapore Island had been carried out.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, the naval staff had drawn up their own memorandum in May 1921, which examined the logistics of moving a fleet to the Far East in time of emergency.<sup>47</sup> They felt there might be a war with Japan by 1930.<sup>48</sup> They opted for the line through the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal. Even with this shorter route, additional oil-storage facilities would have to be provided at Aden and Ceylon. If these were available, and if three days' warning were given to the



Admiralty, and if the weather conditions on passage were favourable, the fleet could arrive in 40 days.

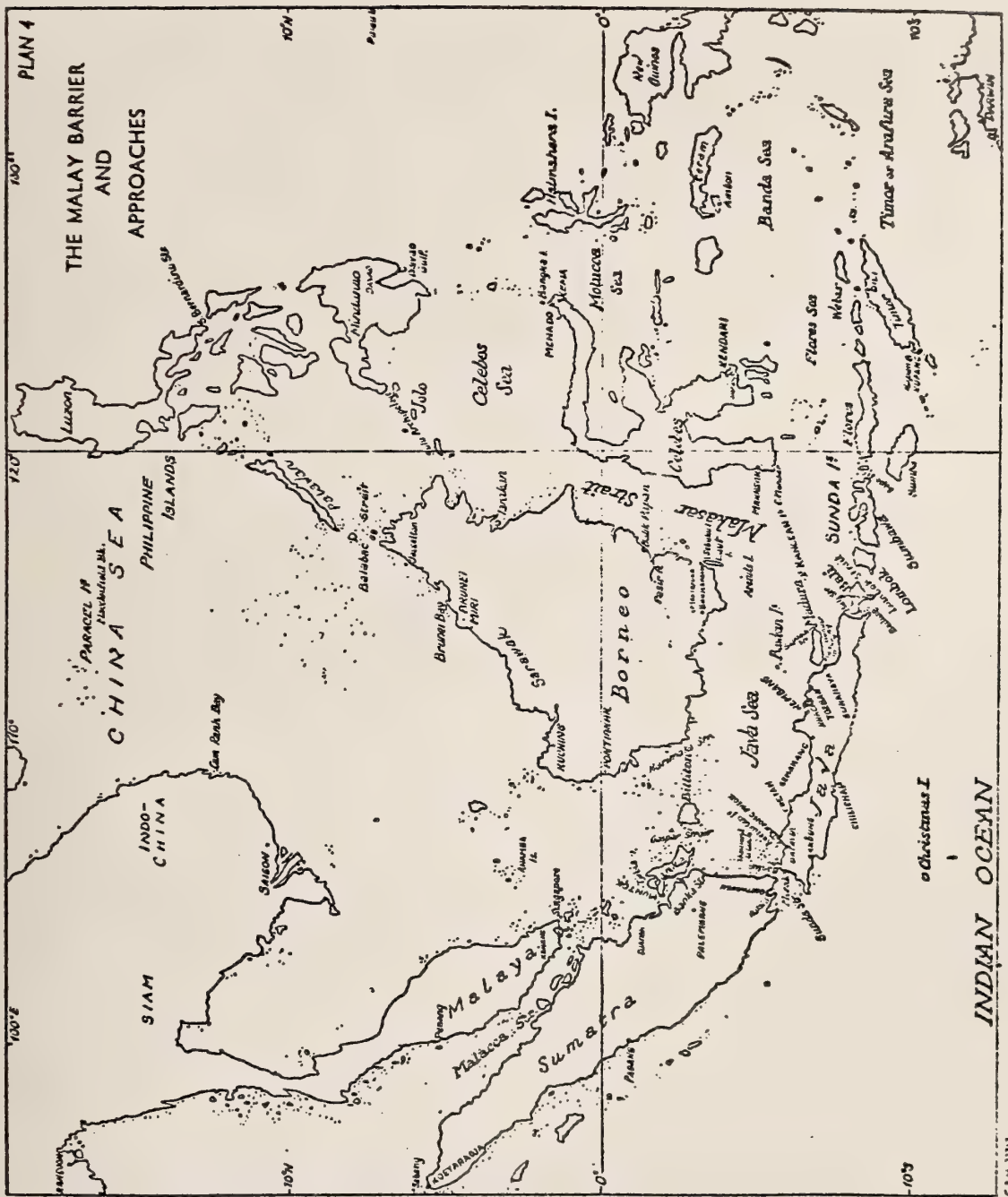
The naval staff realized, however, that "due to financial and political limitations", it was impossible to maintain a fleet in Asian waters in any way comparable to the Japanese fleet.<sup>49</sup> They therefore recommended that the China Squadron be reinforced with a balanced fleet consisting of two battle cruisers, four Hawkins 8" cruisers, four light Town-Class cruisers, the Vindictive sea-plane carrier, one aircraft carrier, 16 destroyers and 14 submarines.<sup>50</sup> They felt that the two powerful battlecruisers along with the other ships could act as "raiders on the Japanese flanks" or as a deterrent to possible Japanese aggressive actions.<sup>51</sup>

The problem was also compounded by the acceptance of the Cabinet of the one-power standard of naval strength. This policy made it impossible for Britain to maintain sufficient naval strength in both the Atlantic and Pacific. To overcome this, it would be necessary to maintain the main strength of the navy in a central position from which it could move quickly to either East or West "as strategic necessity may dictate".

These were the realities. The fleet could not, in peacetime, be maintained in the Far East; but, in order for the fleet to move East, there had to be facilities to receive it there, for docking, refueling and repair. Fixed defences and fuel storage could not be improvised on the spur of the moment.



MAP II.







The capture of these facilities bases, especially those at Singapore, would add tremendous difficulties to the British fleet in its operations against the Japanese navy. Not surprisingly, the O.D.C. were of the opinion that it was essential that steps should be taken forthwith to develop Singapore on the lines considered necessary by the Admiralty.<sup>52</sup>

Singapore was to be the major base. The C.I.D., in reviewing the O.D.C. Report, added a few of its own comments.<sup>53</sup>

As far as could be foreseen the most likely war for some time to come would be one between the white and yellow races whose interests lay in the Pacific, and the view expressed was that it was no longer possible to rely on a treaty which could be terminated at far shorter notice than the period necessary for providing adequate defences.

In the case of war with Japan, "Singapore, which was considered to be the keystone of Imperial defence in the Far East, if not adequately defended, would fall an easy prey to the enemy before the British fleet could arrive."

On June 13, 1921, the Standing Defence Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Lord Balfour \* submitted its

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\* The Standing Defence Subcommittee was for two years or more, the virtual replacement of the C.I.D. The date of its creation is either 1920 or May 1921. It emerged out of demands by the Parliamentary Army Committee for a Standing Joint Defence Subcommittee of the C.I.D., which would include British and Dominion service chiefs. The Prime Minister was too busy to chair the committee, so the task was given to Lord Balfour, Lord President of the Council. At such times that Balfour was unavailable, Churchill



report on Imperial defence.<sup>54</sup> In essence, it reiterated what the O.D.C. had reported, and included an Admiralty memo<sup>55</sup> which stated that there were not sufficient tanker ships available to support the fleet in operations in the Far East or to keep up with fast-moving naval ships. There was a desperate requirement for storage facilities along the sea-road to the East. If an urgent call for the fleet to sail to Singapore came, the Admiralty could only respond with extreme difficulty, and by taking extreme risks.

The total cost was estimated at £5 million. The Treasury said no. The risks in the Far East had to be faced - and diplomacy, not armaments, must face them.<sup>56</sup> As Lord Curzon wrote: "Financial considerations at present prevent work on Singapore from being carried out. Moreover, the work of our fleet does not permit the constant presence of H.M. ships at that port."<sup>57</sup> At a Cabinet meeting on June 16, 1921,<sup>58</sup> therefore, it was stressed that the Government had to be in a position to tell the Dominions that Britain had a naval policy; one which was practical. "This was even

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took the chair. Its membership included the political and professional heads of the armed services, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other ministers. (F.A. Johnson, Defence by Committee The Committee of Imperial Defence 1885-1959, London, 1960, pp 170. Also Lord Hankey, "The Origin and Development of the Committee of Imperial Defence", The Army Quarterly, Vol. XIV (July 1927), pp 267.





more important than actually commencing the work of developing Singapore at the moment."<sup>59</sup>

The concept of the base was in many ways an anomaly. The British Government was asked to embark upon the construction of a major fleet base to provide for a war which they did not believe would come, against an enemy which they did not feel would attack, at a time when financial conditions, as the Cabinet saw them, were forcing drastic cuts in defence spending. So much depended on an efficient war-ready navy, yet the British government were seeking ways to limit spending on naval armaments and to curtail any new ship construction.

Yet the Admiralty's thinking concerning naval defence in the Far East was founded on the premise that the naval centre of gravity had shifted to the Far East with the ending of World War I, and that Japan was the potential enemy. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was still operative, but until its future was finally determined, British naval plans were merely theoretical exercises, not actual realities. The Imperial Conference, which would shortly be meeting in London, would have high on its agenda the future of the Alliance and naval defence in general.

In January 1920, the Foreign Office had asked the Admiralty for their view of the Alliance.<sup>60</sup> They noted that Japan was in favour of renewal, and also suggested that to strengthen the position of the British negotiators when the time came to discuss the alliance with the Japanese, a



powerful squadron of capital ships should be based on Singapore.

The Admiralty replied to this letter in February.<sup>61</sup> They were against renewal of the Alliance, on the somewhat illogical grounds that they could not provide sufficient forces to help Britain sustain a tough policy with Japan.<sup>62</sup> It is not clear why the Admiralty came to this conclusion. Perhaps they misinterpreted the Foreign Office view, thinking that renewal of the Alliance was predicated on the stationing of a strong British Naval Force on Singapore. As this latter condition was impossible to obtain, logic would suggest to the Admiralty that the Alliance should be allowed to lapse.

For the moment, the future of the Alliance and with it the Admiralty's plans to cope with post-World War situations, would have to wait until the Imperial Conference of 1921 had discussed this.

The Admiralty had already worked out the basic Far Eastern strategy. It was not a 'fresh approach',<sup>63</sup> on the contrary, its roots could be traced back to the moment when the British concentrated their fleet in home waters leaving the Far East to be defended by the Japanese. During this period, the question of British strategy, if the Alliance were to be terminated, had been raised time and again by the members of the C.I.D., by the Pacific Dominions, and by such naval officers as Jellicoe and Lambton.

The Admiralty had repeatedly referred to the dispatch



of a fleet to the Far East if it were required. As long as the main fleet of the Royal Navy was "in being", then the Japanese would never be certain when it would arrive to attack their long and vulnerable lines of communication. This assumption was based on the clear distinction between major operations by the Japanese against the Pacific Dominions and small scale raids. The latter were seen to be a major problem which could be coped with by the forces of the Dominion supported by units of the Royal Navy. These raids would not be designed to "capture" the Dominions but to force the Royal Navy to split its forces between Europe, the major theatre of war, and the Pacific, allowing the Japanese to defeat the Royal Navy in detail.

The strategic thinking behind the Singapore naval base was founded on giving the Royal Navy the mobility to operate in the Pacific; and, as long as the base held out, its position blocked Japan's moves South and West. Japan would have to tie up her forces to blockade or attack the base, thus weakening her efforts in other directions. She could bypass the base; but this would allow the Royal Navy to arrive unhindered to attack Japanese communications from the flank or rear. Singapore was thus the key place where battle would be joined with advantage to the Royal Navy.





FOOTNOTES

1. Bonar Law to Geddes, 23/11/18, Adm. 116/1809.
2. S. Roskill, Naval Policy Between the Wars, London 1968. P. 104.
3. Memo G.T. 7646, 8/7/19, A.C.P. Case 34.
4. Ibid.
5. Letter 17/7/19, Cab. 21/159.
6. Memo by Sect. of the C.I.D. Hankey, C.I.D. 1055-B, 23/7/31, Bab. 4/21.
7. Memo 12/8/19, Adm. 116/1779 Long and Chamberlain had already exchanged private letters in respect to naval policy. Long to Chamberlain (Chancellor of the Exchequer). 25/4/19, A.C.P. Case 25.
8. War Cab. Meeting 15/8/19, Cab. 23/16, also C.I.D. 236th Meeting, 5/7/28, Cab. 2/5.
9. Cab. Meeting 15/10/19, Cab. 23/16.
10. Loc. Cit., also Memo Chancellor of the Exchequer 1/2/20, F.C. 68, A.C.P. Case 34.
11. Peter Silverman, "The Ten Year Rule", JRUSI, Vol. CXVI, (March 1971), pp. 42-43.
12. Note by Treasury, 11/3/32, C.I.D. 1082-B, Cab. 4/21.
13. Meeting with the Canadian Delegation, C.I.D. 11/7/12, Cab. 2/2/3.
14. Memo on peace treaty, 16/11/20 in A.C. 25, also C.I.D. memo 14/12/20, Cab. 2/3.
15. The long and protracted battle between the R.A.F. and the Admiralty over the allocation of aircraft to anti-submarine patrols by coastal command is outlined in S. Roskill, The War At Sea, Vol. II, Chapter III. Also it should be noted that the R.A.F. sank more German U-Boats than the Navy (R.A.F. includes R.C.A.F.)
16. Lloyd George, War Memoirs, Vol. V, London, 1936, pp. 1845-1863.



17. Webster and Frankland, Op. Cit. pp. 37-39, Adm. memo 15/8/17, Adm. 116/1602.
18. Webster and Frankland, Op. Cit., Vol. I, p. 38. For details of the whole strategic bombing issue, see Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-45. Vol. I, pt. 1, London, 1961, N. Vanier, The Air Offensive Against Germany, London, 1970, esp. Introduction. For the bombing policy see for example J.P. (41) 15, 5/11/41, Cab. 84/26, C.P. 311 (40) 4, WM (40) 246, 10/9/40.
19. See Adm. memo 6/2/22 Cab. 24/32 and C in C. Med. to Admiralty Adm. 13/8/21 Cab. 29/32.
20. There were many who did criticize the battleship concept: See Times 15/12/23, also S.I.A. pt. 1, p. 9, H. of C. Debates, Vol. 175, 25/3/24. Cab. 1186-88. Lord Fisher to Times, 20/10/19, also Daily Herald 15/3/24 and Daily Mail 19/3/24.
21. The Admiralty view of submarines was expressed by Lord Chatfield, when as First Sea Lord he wrote "submarines should never again be able to present us with the problem we were faced with in 1917, and in fact it is considered that war experiences will show that with adequate defences the operation of submarines against vessels in convoy can be made unprofitable, and a nation which has started such a policy would, as a result of the heavy losses in submarines, be compelled before long to abandon it." Memo J.P.S.C., Annex 1, prev. ref. C.O.S. 488 (J.P.) and J.P. 157, 2/11/36, in Cab. 4/25. On another occasion, Chatfield stated that an increase in the submarine strength in the Far East "would not increase the power of the navy to act as a deterrent to Japan", D.P.R. 5, 20/1/36, Cab. 16/123. The Admiralty were convinced that ASDIC had beaten the U-boats, that the stigma of unrestricted warfare would prevent Germany from using it again, and that the fear of pushing neutrals into the war against Germany would deter Germany from adopting the unrestricted submarine warfare policy of 1916, (Memo J.P.S.C. Ibid.). It must be noted that almost all of the senior officers of the Royal Navy came from the decks of the surface fleet and had at some time or other served on or commanded a battleship or battle cruiser. Aircraft carriers came too late and were too few for many officers to have gained any experience with them or for many





21. (continued)  
ranking officers to have learned to fly. As the carrier had not been used in active operations to any extent, those officers who had served on such vessels, had little if any experience of wartime operations where carriers played a part. Whatever their views of the carrier as a major fighting unit, they had little war-based evidence to back them up. Between 1918 and 1922 the British Submarine force was reduced from 138 boats to 55, of which 11 were in reserve. No new ones were built until 1927, Alistair Mars, British Submarines At War, 1939-45, London 1971, p. 17.
22. For example cruise of the Hood, Repulse and 1st Lt. Cruiser Squadron which visited the U.S.A. and Pacific Dominions in 1924, see E. Bradford, The Mighty Hood, London 1959, pp. 69, 71-79 and Chapter IX; also Brassey's Naval Annual, various years, for information of "showing the flag" cruises of British ships.
23. For a description of the navy's ambassadorial role, see Lt. Cdr. K. Edwards, The Grey Diplomats, London, 1938. For an indication as to the importance of the navy as showing the strength of British power abroad, see "British Naval strength in the Far East, The Question of Stationing a Squadron of Capital Ships in the Far East with its H.Q. at Singapore," Adm. 1870/39, 1188/39, Adm. 1/9919, and F.O. File F11829/47/61.
24. Bd. Memo in Adm. 167/57.
25. E.E. Morison, "A Case Study of Innovation", Engineering and Science Monthly, A.P. 1950.
26. Adm. Memo 8/7/20 and 10/8/20 Adm. 1/8602.
27. See Tables XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, for details of British and Japanese Ships, 1939-1942.
28. Debates, Commons, 1920, Vol. 135, Col. 2507.
29. Adm. Memo of 14/12/20, Adm. 116/1775.
30. Churchill to Balfour, 26/2/21, Balfour Papers, 49698.
31. For example, Churchill wrote in the Daily Telegraph 8 September 1938, that "it now looks as if the original danger (or air attacks on war ships) was much exaggerated. As First Lord and later Prime



31. (continued)  
Minister, he pushed the construction of the King George V battleships; Prince of Wales, Duke of York, Anson and Howe and the K.G.V. Laid down in 1937, they joined the fleet between 1940 and 1942.. Churchill also had the Vanguard built which was launched in 1944. She never fired a shot in anger, for she was completed in 1946. She was a beautiful ship - went into reserve in 1954. See S. Bonnett, The Price of Admiralty, London, 1968, pp. 232-3 and Chapter 17.
32. To be fair it should be noted that some of the younger naval senior officers contested Beatty's views. Rear Admiral Herbert Richmond, then President of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich; Rear Admiral Sydney Hall, formerly Commodore Submarines 1915-18 (later Admiral Hall) and Rear Admiral C. de Bartalomé, former Third Sea Lord, argued against the battleship concept.
33. For a summary of British military might during the interim period see Higham, Op. Cit. pp. 65-66. For example of yearly naval thinking, the reader may consult Brassey's Naval Annual, for various years.
34. Quoted in G.H. Gill, The Royal Australian Navy, 1939-45, Canberra, 1957, p. 35.
35. Memo, J.P.S.C., Annex 1, previous C.O.S. 488 (J.P.) and J.P. 147, 2/11/36, Cab. 4/25.
36. Adm. Memo 21/10/19, Adm. 1/8572, also Adm. MO4580 19/5/20 Adm. 1/8574.
37. C.I.D. Meeting 14/12/20, Cab. 2/3.
38. C.I.D. 131-C, Feb. 1921, also dated 25/4/21 and 1/6/21, Cab. 21/187.
39. The paper was presented to an Interdepartmental Cabinet Committee which had been set up by Lloyd George under the Chairmanship of Leopold Amery, then Secretary of State for Colonies. In its report, it laid out the major issues that would be discussed at the Imperial Conference. These were: the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Dominion Constitutional Development, Imperial Defence and Foreign Affairs. See Report 4/2/21 Adm. 1/8611.





40. It is open to question just how seriously the British Cabinet took the American building programme, particularly as the 66th Congress was not anxious to provide the funds for it. See 66th Congress, 2nd Session, House Doct. Vol. 32, and Annual Report of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1919, Appendix D. The British worry was that the Americans had the financial capability to build a navy of great size. Col. A. Murray to Eric Drummond and Lord Reading, 5/12/18 in B.P. 49742.
41. C.I.D. Meeting 2/5/21, Cab. 2/3, also C. in C. China 726 1/10/20. Adm. 116/3100, "No more suitable position can be suggested than Singapore."
42. Notes by naval members for the O.D.C. 5/5/21, Cab. 8/8. See comments C. in C. China 14/4/20, 1882/20/1217.
43. Ibid.
44. Hong Kong, the Admiralty admitted, was of vital interest, and they could not view its capture with equanimity. Its loss would be a tremendous setback to British prestige and naval capability in the Far East. Unfortunately, it was in a precarious position and its defence could not be guaranteed, especially if under attack by a strong Japanese force. "It is well known that Japanese ambitions" stated the naval members, "extend southwards, and this tends to leave Hong Kong more and more exposed." Notes by Naval Members, Op. Cit.
45. Singapore base. Date unknown in Cab. 27/402, see also Adm. to C. in C. EI 12/3/20. M00340 Adm. 116/3100. See Far Eastern War Memo 20/1/20. M00340 Adm. 116/3100, in which the period before relief was to be three months. The Admiralty changed it from six weeks to two months on 3/12/20.
46. The Treasury who had representatives on the O.D.C. and C.I.D. were not anxious to see the Cabinet incur the expense of the base. They asked if it was really necessary - treasury note 10/5/21 in Cab. 7/9.
47. D.P. 1633/21; Adm. 1/8607.
48. Why 1930 is not made clear from the documents. Possibly it was based on the Ten Year Rule which implied that by 1929 (ten years after it was accepted policy in 1919), Japan would be the nation against whom a major war might have to be fought. Thus 1930 would be the first year that the rule did not apply.





49. M00340 20/1/20, Op. Cit.
50. Adm. M00340 and M00340A of 20/1/20 and 25/1/20. Adm. 116/3100.
51. Letter Admiralty to C in C China M00343 2/2/21, Adm. 116/3100, also C in C China to Adm. M04580 12/3/20, Adm. 116/3100.
52. Adm. Memo in C.I.D. notes 6/5/21, Cab. 2/3.
53. C.I.D. 143-C 10/6/21, Cab. 2/3.
54. Imperial Defence studied under Chairmanship of Lord Balfour 13/6/21, A.C.P. Case 26.
55. Adm. Memo 21/2/21, quoted in Ibid.
56. Treasury Memo 7/6/21, Cab. 2/6.
57. Lord Curzon, Adm. M01286, 4/7/20, Adm. 116/3100.
58. Cab. 56 (21) 3 16/6/21.
59. Many questioned the wisdom of the Singapore base concept, and pointed out that to build Singapore was "akin to building a stable to hold an elephant when what might be wanted in the end was a house for a terrier". Adm. Mark Kerr quoted in the Times, 15/12/23. See also Lord Fisher letter to Ed. Times, 20/10/19, also K.G.B. Dewar, "Singapore Naval Base" Contemporary Review, Vol. 138 (July 1930) p. 27-28. A look into the Debates in the House of Commons during the period 1919-25, as well as at the columns of the Times, Manchester Guardian, Daily Herald, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph will give the reader the wide range of opinion concerning the Singapore project that was held at the time.
60. F.O. to Adm. 21/1/20 to J.R.M. Butler, E.L. Woodward, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd series, 1919-39, Vol. VI, pp. 1053-4.
61. Adm. to F.O. 12/2/20, Ibid. p. 1054.
62. Roskill, Op. Cit., p. 293 and Adm. Letter 0233, 12/2/20.
63. Adm. War Memo M00340, 20/1/20, Adm. 116/3100.



### CHAPTER III

#### FAR EASTERN NAVAL DEFENCE, 1920S

On May 30, 1921, in preparation for the forthcoming Imperial Conference, the Cabinet had asked the C.I.D. to prepare a study of the strategic situation in the event that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was terminated.<sup>1</sup>

The C.I.D. submitted their appraisal on June 17.<sup>2</sup> They noted that in the past the Alliance had relieved the Admiralty of regarding Japan as a possible enemy. As well, British naval requirements in the Pacific were met, as long as the combined British and Japanese naval forces were superior to those of any hostile combination that might be arrayed against them.

Strategically, therefore, the C.I.D. felt the renewal of the Alliance had much to commend it, particularly if some form of understanding with the Americans could be obtained which would help curtail the growing hostility between the United States and Japan. If the Alliance was terminated without "any understanding with the United States", the whole strategic situation would require serious reconsideration by Britain and the Empire, and "the development of bases and facilities would have to be constructed in haste".

While there was a growing distrust of Japanese motives in the Far East,<sup>3</sup> the C.I.D. realized that if the Alliance was ended, Britain would have to build a two-ocean fleet,





construct bases and facilities, and maintain a large military establishment there.

. The Alliance had been discussed by the War Cabinet also on May 30, 1921.<sup>4</sup> After much deliberation, the decision was for renewal. The British Government now had to convince the Dominion Delegations to the Imperial Conference of the merits of maintaining the Alliance.

The issue of the renewal of the Alliance and its effect on Imperial-American relations brought differences between the Dominions into the open. Basically the division was between Canada, supported by South Africa, and Australia and New Zealand. For the former two Dominions, good Anglo-American relations and the shunning of entangling alliances were paramount; while for Australia and New Zealand, security against Japan in the Pacific was the overriding concern. The clash between Arthur Meighen, who had succeeded Sir Robert Borden as Prime Minister of Canada, and Australia's Prime Minister William "Billy" Hughes paralleled a similar division within the British Cabinet - between those who regarded good Anglo-American relations as paramount, and others who favoured renewal of the Alliance and looked on the United States with distaste and resentment.<sup>5</sup>

Meighen revealed himself as being thoroughly against the renewal of the Alliance in any form. He went on to demand that in questions where the interests of one Dominion were particularly concerned, Imperial policy should be shaped by



that Dominion. The Meighen concept arose logically out of the attempt to conduct a coherent Imperial foreign policy by consultation between separate Prime Ministers, responsible to separate Cabinets, who in turn were responsible to separate electorates. The questions Meighen raised of continuous consultation and Dominion paramountcy were never answered and went, by default, when the American government won the race to call a Pacific Conference by a hair's breadth.<sup>6</sup>

The proceedings of the Washington Conference have been well documented,<sup>7</sup> and it would be repetitious to go into them. The results of the Conference, however, did exercise a profound effect on the strategic situation in the Pacific region.

The two treaties that exerted the greatest impact on British Far Eastern naval strategy were the Treaty for the Limitation of Armaments<sup>8</sup> and the Treaty Relating to Insular Possessions and Insular Dominions in the Pacific Ocean (the Four Power Pact); which, along with the 'Declaration' regarding the mandated islands, was signed on December 13, 1921.<sup>9</sup>

Basic to the former Treaty were the proposals made by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to the Conference on the morning of November 12, 1921.<sup>10</sup> Hughes proposed that each of the major naval powers - Great Britain, the United States and Japan carries out a massive scrapping of capital ships. He informed the Conference that his government was ready to scrap fifteen capital ships under construction, and several others almost 80% completed, plus 15 pre-Dreadnought battle-



ships. The displacement of the thirty ships to be placed under the hammer was nearly 846,000 tons. To match this American programme, the British would destroy nineteen old capital ships and not lay down the four planned super Hoods.

The British tonnage to be scrapped was about 583,000 tons. Japan on her part, would be obliged to abandon her programme to build eight capital ships, to scrap seven others under construction, and to destroy ten pre-Dreadnought class ships. The total tonnage involved was nearly 450,000 tons.

The capital ship strength of each of the three powers, according to Hughes, was to be: the United States - 18, Great Britain - 22, and Japan - 10, giving a tonnage ratio of 501,000 for the United States, 604,000 for Great Britain and 300,000 for Japan. Hughes recommended that no new capital ships be built for ten years (the ten year holiday); that any new ships built should not exceed 35,000 tons displacement, and that age limit for replacement should, subject to a ten year holiday, be twenty years. In addition, replacements should be limited so that the capital ship tonnage between the three powers be 500,000 for the United States and Great Britain, and 300,000 tons for Japan: or as it became known, the 5:5:3 ratio.

Coming as a complete surprise to the delegates at the Conference, the proposals did not find easy acceptance. There was much hard bargaining necessary before the treaties were finalized.<sup>11</sup>





British opposition to the Hughes' strategy of naval limitation centered on the arguments that a slow replacement policy was better than a ten year holiday. Adherence to the ten year holiday would mean that Britain would then end up with an obsolete fleet, with the exception of ships of the Hood class. She would then have to undertake a vast ship-building programme. This in turn was based on the possibility of a war with Japan occurring four or five years after the end of the holiday. If such an event materialized, the British Fleet would consist of eight old ships in European waters and fourteen equally ancient capital ships available for service in the Far East. While this would give the Royal Navy a numerical superiority in Far Eastern waters, the Japanese ships, laid down and commissioned later than the British, would be more modern.

While the Admiralty and the C.I.D. concurred in almost all respects with the views of the British Delegation in Washington about the Hughes proposals, the Cabinet was coming to contrary conclusions. Here one finds the hand of Winston Churchill, who drafted most of the telegrams to Washington. Churchill wanted the ten year holiday, and had cabled the British Delegation on December 9, 1921, that the Cabinet "had strong views on the question of the ten year holiday and were not going to be diverted from that policy".<sup>12</sup> The following day, the Prime Minister cabled that the Cabinet agreed that "the ten year holiday should be adhered to".<sup>13</sup>



Like the British ~~Delegation~~, the Japanese did not like the Hughes proposals.<sup>14</sup> On December 1, the head of the British Delegation, Lord Balfour, called on his Japanese counterpart, Baron Kato. Kato outlined the difficulty of convincing his government to accept a ratio of less than 70% of the United States' strength in capital ships. Kato inferred that Japanese objections would be assuaged if the United States would agree to a status quo in respect to fortifications in the Pacific.<sup>15</sup>

Later in the day Balfour met with Hughes at the Pan-American Building, where he presented Kato's proposals.<sup>16</sup> These included a stand-still on any fortifications by the United States at Manila and at Guam, and American agreement for Japan to retain the Mutsu \*, which was 98% completed.

The end result was that Japan kept the Mutsu, while scrapping an older ship. The Americans retained the two most modern ships of the 1916 programme (Colorado and Washington). The British had to scrap two of their oldest Dreadnoughts, but were permitted to build two new capital ships within the prescribed limits of 35,000 tons. . The treaty which incorporated these proposals became known as the Four Power Pact, (the fourth power was France, included on Hughes' insistence). It brought to an end the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

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\* 33,800 tons, 8 x 16" Guns, 32 kts.





There was still much tedious negotiation to be undertaken before the issue of fortifications was resolved. For six weeks, the Japanese, American and British delegates argued over definitions of what constituted the geographical areas that could or could not be fortified. The British, who during the Imperial Conference had promised the Pacific Dominions to construct a naval base at Singapore, demanded that it be exempt from the status quo provision. Lloyd George made this abundantly clear in a telegram to Balfour.

This we regard as indispensable and we hope that you will make sure there is no misunderstanding with the Americans, and still more, the Japanese on this point. As you are aware - the defence of Australia and New Zealand might, in certain circumstances, depend entirely on Singapore.<sup>17</sup>

At the end of January 1922, the weary delegates reached agreement, which was incorporated as a Supplementary Treaty, and in an article in the Naval Limitation Treaty. In brief, the Supplementary Treaty provided for the status quo as regards defences and naval bases in specified areas of the Pacific:

For Great Britain-Hong Kong, but not Singapore or islands adjacent to Canada, Australia or New Zealand.

For the United States, the Philippines, Guam, and the Aleutians, but not Hawaii or islands adjacent to Alaska, the Pacific coast and Panama.

For Japan-Formosa and the Pescadores, and the Ryuku, Bonin and Kurile Islands, but not the homeland or islands adjacent.<sup>18</sup>



Over the Treaty for the Limitation of Armament, there was still much haggling, particularly over the size of cruisers, the use of submarines and aircraft carriers. In respect to the first, the British fought hard for and gained acceptance of an upper tonnage limit for cruisers of 10,000 tons armed with 8" guns.\* The two new types of warships, the aircraft carrier and the submarine, were subjects of protracted negotiation. In the end, submarines escaped limitation, much to the chagrin of the British, who had first-hand experience during the Great War, of the havoc they could wreak on merchant-ships. As for aircraft carriers, agreement was reached on tonnage limits: 135,000 for Great Britain and the United States, and 81,000 for Japan. Carriers were not subject to the holiday and could be replaced at any time. In addition, while a size qualification was incorporated into the Treaty for carriers of 27,000 tons, each power could build two of these ships of 33,000 tons, provided the total tonnage was not exceeded.<sup>19</sup>

In regard to capital ships, the Hughes ratios were

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\* There were two classes of cruisers defined by the Washington Treaty. B. Class on which there was no limitation on numbers, provided they were not armed with guns heavier than 6.1", did not exceed the limit of 10,000 tons displacement. The class of ship which the British built was the County of London Class Cruiser, of 10,000 tons and 8 x 8" guns. The numbers of Cruisers was to emerge time and again at subsequent Limitation of Armament Conferences.





accepted, with Great Britain retaining 22 ships totalling 580,450 tons, the United States 18 ships totalling 500,650 tons and Japan having 10 ships displacing a total of 301,320 tons.

The strategic implications of the treaties were profound. For Japan, the standstill agreement was most valuable, the vital point being the American pledge not to fortify Guam or the Philippines. The Americans were in the course of constructing defences at Guam when the 1922 Treaty on the Limitation of Armaments demanded that work be stopped, and it was not resumed until the Treaty was terminated at the end of 1936. Its strategic importance was obvious and lay in the very heart of the Japanese Mandated Islands - a constant irritant to Japan which the United States did not want to aggravate. The Philippines, lying less than 200 miles from Formosa, are geographically simply a northward extension of Indonesia. In 1916, the United States had declared they would grant independence to the Philippines by 1946. Nevertheless, the islands were in fact American territory, and if attacked by the Japanese, it was possible that the Americans would go to war. Yet the pledge to maintain the status quo, and to adhere to the limitation of naval armaments, had made it impossible for the United States to put in train any single-handed Far Eastern policy. The nearest American base to the Philippines was Pearl Harbor on Oahu Island, Hawaii. Alone of all the American bases overseas, it received first





priority on men and equipment, and in the spring of 1940 Pearl Harbor became the base for the Pacific Fleet. Unfortunately the defences were meager. There was a constant shortage of air craft for long range reconnaissance, and since the base was exposed, it was impossible to conceal the movements of the Fleet.

The Mandate had also brought Japan within striking distance of the Netherlands East Indies, an area rich in oil and other natural resources. This island chain stretched for over 2,700 miles, and was clearly impossible to defend.

Japan was therefore now in a position to launch a major assault against the Netherlands East Indies. The Dutch, without a large fleet which they could send to the Far East, realized that their security depended ultimately on the capability of the Royal Navy to control sea communications in the entire area. For the British, the strategic importance of the East Indies was obvious. If the Japanese seized the Islands, they could neutralize Singapore and threaten Australia and New Zealand.

For Japan, the Washington Treaties were a diplomatic and strategic success. She had gained virtual immunity from naval attack, was secure in the North Pacific surrounded by a ring of Mandated islands, and possessed a fleet well able to stave off any naval threat. Nowhere was there a base from which an attack on the Japanese mainland could be launched



or a blockade maintained. The nearest American base was at Pearl Harbor, over 3,000 miles away.

Close to Japan was Hong Kong; but that base could not, by the terms of the Washington Treaties, be turned into a major fleet base. The Treaties therefore ended any claim that Britain was a global naval power. They also signaled that the naval centre of gravity had shifted from the North Sea to the Pacific. Moreover, with the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Britain had lost her principal naval ally in the Pacific, in return for a document which imposed little obligation on its signatories and might be discarded by any one of them when convenient.

On the surface, the Washington Treaty did not immediately alter the naval balance of power in Europe. Even if hostilities occurred between Great Britain and any one of the two European naval powers, it was believed that the Royal Navy was sufficiently strong to dispatch a fleet equal in strength to that of Japan. At the worst, if England were engaged in war with Italy and France combined, the Royal Navy would supposedly still be in a position to send strong forces eastward to stand guard against Japan; for in an age when the strength of fleets was calculated in battleships, the belief was held in London

that maintenance in the Japanese Navy was poor; and the relative efficiency of Japan's fleet was assessed by the Chiefs of Staff as at best 80% of





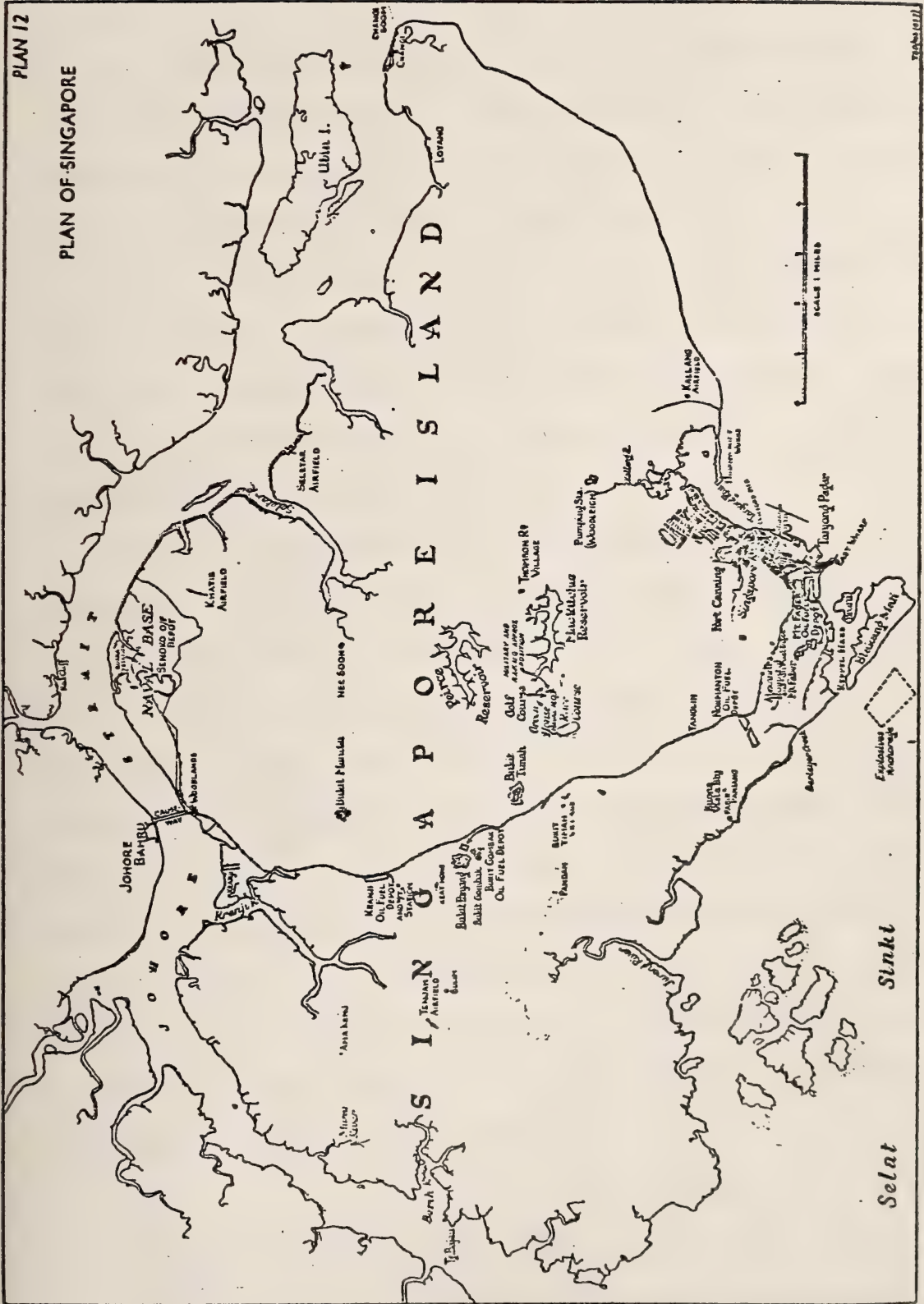
the British. Consequently, our margin of seven battleships over and above the six which it was essential to retain in home waters, would bring us almost to parity with the Japanese.<sup>20</sup>

A closer examination of the Washington Treaty soon showed certain flaws in British strategic thinking. One of the paramount reasons why Britain accepted the treaty limitations was that it effectively curtailed the United States Navy<sup>21</sup> from becoming superior to the Royal Navy. There had been an emotional and strategic conflict in the minds of the Sea Lords of the Admiralty. When they realized that they could not compete with the building programme launched by the Americans, they utilized propaganda and influence to have it curtailed. To this end, the British were willing to sacrifice their own two-power standard. The first indication of this change in policy was given by Walter Long, on March 17, 1920, when he stated that the Royal Navy should NOT BE INFERIOR TO ANY OTHER POWER.<sup>22</sup> From that moment on, British naval policy was aimed at achieving an agreement based on parity with the United States. The Washington Treaties signalled the successful start of this policy.<sup>23</sup>

On June 14, 1922, the legislation to conform with the Treaties was submitted to the Commons and to the House of Lords for first reading. Less than a month later, they were approved by Parliament.

When the Admiralty delegates returned home from Washington, they had to accept the British economic situation and







the new realities of Empire naval co-operation. In respect to the latter, whatever aspirations the Admiralty had had concerning the development of an Imperial fleet with the Dominions contributing their fair share, had been dispelled during the previous Imperial Conference.

During the meetings, the Admiralty had presented their views on Imperial naval defence to the Dominion delegates. They had proposed British Empire Naval Strength to consist of 12 battleships, 8 battle cruisers, 26 light cruisers plus ancillary vessels and a fleet train.<sup>24</sup>

While the Admiralty had reluctantly recognized that nationalism in each of the Dominions except for New Zealand would prevent any of the Dominion Governments from contributing directly to the strength and upkeep of the Royal Navy, the Admiralty did hope that the separate navies would be increased in strength so that the combined Imperial Navy would confirm with the Admiralty's proposals. Just how large each fleet would be was an open-ended question, but one thing became certain: no Dominion was prepared to have anything but the barest minimum of a navy.<sup>25</sup> Balfour had also outlined the C.I.D's views on Imperial defence in respect to the Pacific,\*pointing out that<sup>26</sup>

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\* It is worth noting the timing of the Announcement to the Dominions of the Singapore scheme, two days before the American resolution of June 30th calling for a conference. It can be surmised that the British announced their acceptance of the plan after





"What is required ... is to make arrangements by which the British fleet can be transferred effectively and rapidly to the Far East ... so as to operate in the Pacific. In these circumstances we have come to the conclusion that one of the most pressing needs for Imperial defence is that Singapore should be made into a place where the British fleet can concentrate for the defence of the Empire."

He went on to quote the C.I.D. paper which outlined the necessity for the Singapore Base. "Whether or not the Anglo-Japanese Alliance is renewed," he said, "the existing situation under which it was impracticable for the British Fleet to operate in the Pacific if a war broke out, could not be allowed to continue, and that the development of the naval base in the Far East is an essential part of British naval policy."<sup>27</sup>

In the end, the Imperial Conference of 1921, while vitally important in terms of advancing Dominion autonomy, had accomplished little towards any real agreement concerning naval defence of the Empire. Singapore and the general assumptions that surrounded its construction were accepted by the delegates; the Admiralty buried once and for all the Jellicoe Plan for Imperial naval co-operation, and it was

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the Imperial Conference got under way to pacify Australia. The Cabinet decision was made on June 16th; the Imperial Conference met at 10 Downing Street on the 20th. Why wait 8 days to announce such an important aspect of Imperial Defence Policy?



obvious that none of the Dominions outside of New Zealand were prepared to contribute towards the Royal Navy or to the Singapore scheme.

This was to be expected. The forthcoming Washington Conference took much of whatever head of steam was present for the establishment of an Imperial navy policy. The Dominions, like Britain, were faced with the same financial burdens and defence was low indeed on their domestic lists of priorities.

The Conference also marked the end of the plans for Imperial co-operation in foreign affairs and defence. The truth that the Imperial system could only work if a common threat was perceived by all, and all the resources of the Empire were committed to one major objective.

Even Australia and India exhibited an amazing reluctance to put hard cash in support of their interests. The burden of Imperial defence fell once again on Britain's shoulders, and as long as the ideology of Empire was maintained, as long as Britain saw herself as the leader protecting her flock, it was a burden she could not discard.

The evolution of British naval policy in the 1920's has been amply explained by Roskill.<sup>28</sup> Certain highlights of the period however, stand out, as they refer to plans for British naval defence in the Far East. In preparation for the Imperial Conference of 1923, the Admiralty prepared several papers, one of which dealt specifically with the need





for the Singapore naval base. This was a reiteration of memoranda and papers previously presented in 1921. In addition, separate appreciations were sent to each Dominion which elaborated upon the obvious changes that had taken place in the strategic situation as a result of the Washington Treaties.

The appreciations dispatched to Australia and New Zealand were identical. They laid great stress on the capability of Japan to gain control of the western Pacific and on the inability of the United States to curtail Japanese designs. They again repeated that in order for the main fleet to operate in the Far East, it was vital that Singapore be developed as a major naval base. The two Dominions were told that it could take between 30 days to 42 days to move the main fleet from European to eastern waters, during which time Japanese strategy would be to seize the base. The object of the Dominion naval forces and local forces stationed on Singapore and in the vicinity, must therefore be to prevent the Japanese from carrying out their objectives.<sup>29</sup> When the Imperial Conference met, Stanley Baldwin, who had become Prime Minister when the ailing Bonar Law resigned on May 22, 1923, took the chair. It became clear that the lion's share of providing for the naval defences of the Empire would continue to fall on the shoulders of the British tax-payer, including provision for the Singapore naval base.<sup>30</sup>

Various plans for Singapore as well as the Admiralty's



plans for the construction of eight 10,000 ton cruisers, an aircraft carrier, three submarines and two destroyers, were overtaken by political events. On January 21, 1924, Baldwin's Government was defeated on a vote of confidence. Ramsay MacDonald became the first Labour Prime Minister.

It was to be expected that , in a Labour Government, the Admiralty's shipbuilding plans were not greeted with great enthusiasm. On February 20, the Cabinet set up a committee under the chairmanship of the Lord Privy Seal, J.R. Clynes, to look at the whole replacement programme for naval ships other than the capital ships during the next ten years, and also to determine the necessity for the Singapore naval base.<sup>31</sup>

Though Beatty made a strong plea for the retention of the Singapore project, emphasizing its strategic importance, it was to no avail. On March 17, 1924, the Cabinet decided to stop the Singapore scheme, on the grounds that the building of the base would be contrary to the Labour Government's policy limitation of armaments and international co-operation.<sup>33</sup>

But before anything decisive could be done, the political situation again changed. On October 8, 1924, the Labour Government was defeated in the Commons. In the ensuing election, the Conservatives were returned to power and Baldwin again became Prime Minister. Not three weeks after Baldwin re-entered 10 Downing Street, the Cabinet reversed the Labour Government's decision to cease work on the Singapore project.<sup>34</sup>



This was not to mean that the Admiralty was to escape the heavy hand of the Treasury or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill. Churchill engaged the Admiralty in a long protracted battle over expenditure. Always in the back of his mind was the application of the Ten Year Rule and its possible extension, as a stick with which to beat down the Admiralty estimates. Thus it was not surprising that he proposed that the C.I.D. have a look at the possible dangers to which the British Empire might be subjected.<sup>35</sup>

When the Admiralty's proposed estimates reached Churchill's desk, he replied with a lengthy paper<sup>36</sup> attacking the Admiralty's apparent policy of preparing the British Fleet for a war against Japan and recommending a drastic cut in the estimates.<sup>37</sup>

The battle over the naval estimates, the Singapore Project and the Ten Year Rule raged in Cabinet, in the C.I.D. and before the Naval Programme Committee chaired by Lord Birkenhead to study British naval requirements. In essence, what Churchill was stating and stating forcefully, was that the Admiralty was taking the possibility of war with Japan too seriously. Churchill's pressing demands for the cessation of Singapore and for a cut-back in the naval estimates were founded on his refusal to believe in a war with Japan,<sup>38</sup> and on his attempts to get the application of the Ten Year Rule extended. Finally the Birkenhead committee asked the C.I.D. for its opinion as to whether or not a war with Japan was a contingency to be





planned for. The C.I.D. came to the conclusion, which was accepted by the Cabinet, that a war with Japan within the next ten years was "not a contingency to be seriously apprehended" , a view which agreed with that of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain.<sup>39</sup>

It was left to the Prime Minister to intervene and suggest a solution. Seven 8" cruisers were to be laid down, four in 1925-26 and three the following year. In addition, the Navy would get one flotilla of Destroyers (one leader and eight destroyers) and six submarines in 1927-28 and each subsequent year until 1929-30.<sup>40</sup>

In October 1926, the Naval Staff reconsidered the distribution of the fleet, with respect to the strength of the China Squadron.\* The earlier idea to send some capital ships out to the Far East with an aircraft carrier was reviewed, and it was suggested that three battle-cruisers plus

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\* The East Indies Squadron consisted of 3 E Class cruisers (6 in. guns, 8-9500 tons: speed 30-32 kts.) of the 4th Cr. Sqn. and 5 sloops. The China Squadron was a balanced force consisting of 6 Kent Class Heavy Cruisers, 10,000 tons, 8 x 8" guns, speed 31 1/2 kts., the ACC Hermes carrying 15 aircraft, 10,500 tons, the 8th Destroyer Flotilla (mainly S Class), 905 tons, 3-4" guns, 34-36 kts. 9 ships, 4 sloops, 1 depot ship, 4th Submarine Flotilla (11 subs. 1 depot ship) of 5 Parthian Class; 447-2,030 tons, 9-17 kts., 8 torpedo tubes, 6 Odin Class, 1475-2030 tons, 8 torpedo tubes, 9-16 kts., 18 River gunboats. See Janes Fighting Ships, 1930, Royal Navy List, 1930, Admiralty Pink List, Adm. 187, also Brassey's Naval Annual, 1930.



a carrier be ready to move out in 1929, and that the submarines' strength be increased to 18 at Hong Kong.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately there was still no major naval base ready to receive even this amount of naval strength. The Singapore naval base had still to be built. To expedite matters, Lord Curzon, the Lord President of the Council, was appointed chairman of a C.I.D. sub-committee to examine the site for the base and its defences.<sup>42</sup>

After lengthy deliberations and reports from the service chiefs of staff, the Curzon Committee came to the conclusion that the base should be built on the Johore Site. As far as construction of the base was concerned, the committee would only recommend that it be confined to preparing the site for a floating dock.<sup>43</sup>

The Cabinet approved the report on March 2, 1925, and the Admiralty had at least some satisfaction in seeing a start made on the base. Later on in July, the C.I.D. had a look at the defences of Australian ports. The basis of the examination was that Singapore was ready; that the Squadron of battle cruisers so often requested by the Admiralty was indeed on station in the Far East.

Taking all these factors into account, the C.I.D. recommended that Darwin should have a number of cruisers stationed on it and a reserve oil storage capacity be built at the port.<sup>45</sup> With little money available for Singapore, however, there was no hope of any being made available to





improve the Australian port. The major point of interest was the continued reference to the stationing of the battle cruisers in the Far East and the time of arrival of the main fleet, now calculated at 42 days.<sup>46</sup>

In June, the Chiefs of Staff (C.O.S.)\*, in preparation for the next Imperial Conference in 1926, sent the C.I.D.

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\* The establishment of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, originally as a sub-committee of the C.I.D., followed the report of a committee set up in 1923 under Lord Salisbury, then Lord President of the Council, to examine the co-ordination of the Defence Forces. The report stated that "... each of the three Chiefs of Staff will have an individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting as it were a super Chief of War Staff in Commission". Report of the Sub-Committee of the C.I.D. on National and Imperial Defence, Cmd. 2029, 1924, p. 18. The C.O.S. should take the initiative and inform the Prime Minister as Chairman of the C.I.D. of any changes in the political military situation that would affect the U.K. See Johnson, Op. Cit., p. 204, and Chatfield, Op. Cit., pp. 78-80.

The Chairman of the C.O.S. was one of the C.O.S. selected by the P.M., normally rotating between the three services. On occasion, if the matter was of great importance, or the C.O.S. could not agree, the P.M. would take the Chair and if it could not be the P.M., then the Lord Chancellor assumed the Chair. M. Howard, "The Central Organization of Defence", JRUSI, Vol. 117, 1972. Air/Commodore B.E.T. Stambridge, "The C.O.S. Committee, 50 Years of Joint Direction". JRUSI, Vol. 118, Dec. 1973.



the first of their Annual Reports on Imperial Defence.<sup>47</sup> This report emphasized the vital necessity of Singapore as the lynch-pin of British Defence in the Far East. In July the C.I.D. considered the C.O.S. report and the whole question of Far Eastern defences once again.<sup>48</sup> Austen Chamberlain immediately stated that he had no reason to believe that Japan was likely to turn belligerent. Churchill then spoke up, giving his views on the Singapore project.

He regarded war with Japan a remote possibility, not to be seriously considered. He attacked the Singapore project on that basis -

if he had foreseen that the decision to develop the base at Singapore would be used as a gigantic excuse for building up armaments and that this country would be invited to pour out money with a view of fighting a war at the other end of the world, he would never have agreed to the development of this base.

The converse of this position was that the Royal Navy should be able to meet not the Japanese Fleet, but the American one. Churchill said he believed that if the U.S.N. gained a preponderance over the R.N., then the white Dominions in the Pacific "would tend increasingly to look towards the United States of America for guidance, and America would certainly not be adverse to the development of this tendency". To Churchill, the Admiralty's stress on the Japanese danger and the need to put money into Singapore, distracted it from maintaining a navy that could match the United States Navy.



This surprising posture of Churchill was not taken seriously. In fact, one suspects that Churchill was throwing the American "threat" into the discussion to indicate how poorly he thought of the Admiralty opinion on the whole problem of Imperial Defence. In Churchill's mind, the Far East always assumed second place to the vital Atlantic; and his comments on the American fleet were in effect a reminder to the Admiralty to keep their eyes on the waters of vital British interests and not become engrossed with far away places in the Pacific.

The Imperial Conference opened in London on October 19, 1926. Aside from general statements regarding defence matters and the Pacific Dominions' interest in Singapore, only New Zealand was willing to contribute to the building of the base.<sup>49</sup>

Near the close of the Imperial Conference, the Prime Minister asked the C.O.S. to consider the defences of Singapore, and the scale of attack they might have to cope with.<sup>50</sup>

It took the C.O.S. over a year to present its report to the C.I.D. in March 1928.<sup>51</sup> They noted that the Admiralty's former plan to send a Battle Cruiser Squadron plus an aircraft carrier to the Far East, had, on advice from the Foreign Office, been deferred, on the grounds that it would be seen as a provocative act by Japan. The C.O.S. almost accepted the Foreign Office's view that the presence of the ships would have acted as a deterrent to a Japanese attack on Singapore, and would





have influenced the overall defence of the base.

In summarizing the situation, the C.O.S. also felt that the scale of attack to be expected had not altered, and that

... consideration of the later stages of the plan of defences should be postponed for the present, since both the scale of attack and the scale of defence will be affected by the ... presence or absence of battlecruisers on the China station.

These recommendations were reviewed and approved by the C.I.D. at their 23<sup>4</sup>th meeting of March 29, 1928.<sup>52</sup> After much hesitation, the Cabinet approved the scheme proposed by both the C.O.S. and C.I.D. for placing heavy guns at Singapore. The floating dry dock (50,000 tons), the largest of its kind in the world, was towed out to the base and put into position in October 1928.<sup>53</sup>

The Admiralty sketch estimates had been ready for nearly a year. Their priorities were to build three 8" cruisers, increase the overseas supplies of oil fuel reserves and storage capabilities, particularly along the Eastern Route, and to improve the anti-aircraft armament of the navy's ships.

The First Sea Lord, Sir Charles Madden, with his Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Sir Frederick Field, had met with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Churchill. They did not have a propitious exchange of views, for Churchill was still looking into every nook and cranny of



the estimates to cut down government spending. He immediately suggested that none of the cruisers due to be laid down in 1927 and 1928 should be started.<sup>54</sup>

Churchill's suggestion prevailed. Soon after Viscount Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty, informed Parliament that two of the three cruisers planned as part of the replacement programme were to be cancelled.<sup>55</sup> But Churchill was not yet finished. In a reply to Bridgeman concerning the naval estimates, he bluntly told him that the Admiralty had not taken into account "the favourable political situation, especially as regards Japan ... or the decision of the government that no war need be anticipated for at least ten years". In such circumstances, Churchill demanded that the Admiralty's estimates be further cut back.<sup>56</sup>

Churchill's posture was reflected by that of the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain. Chamberlain felt war with France was inconceivable, and that Japan "had never been so peacefully inclined as at present" and would only react to a threat to her interests in Manchuria. Overall it could be assumed that there would not be a major war for the next ten years.<sup>57</sup>

In June 1928, Churchill wrote to the C.I.D.<sup>58</sup> that

it should be laid down as a standing assumption that at any given day there will be no major war for ten years from that date; and that this should rule unless or until on the initiative of the Foreign Office or of one of the fighting services, or otherwise, it is decided to alter it.





Churchill's memorandum, which made the Ten Year Rule into a moving concept, was discussed at the 236th meeting of the C.I.D. in July 1928. At this meeting, Churchill pointed out that the Admiralty seemed to feel that they needed to be prepared for a war against Japan at the end of the ten year period, that is by 1938. This he did not accept. Bridgeman and Balfour (Lord President) both stood against the idea of Churchill's concept of making the Ten Year period of no war a rule which was advanced each successive year: "Nobody", Balfour stated, "could say that from any one moment war was an impossibility for the next ten years, and that we could not rest in a state of unpreparedness on such an assumption by anybody".<sup>60</sup>

Austen Chamberlain<sup>61</sup> possibly carried the greatest weight. It was for him to say if the "credit of peace" still had ten years to run. He said that the Foreign Office had the greatest responsibility in advising the government with regard to the decision as to what period of peace might be expected. "But", he added, "it would be impossible for the Foreign Office to give any guarantee in regard to the advice it gave." The world situation appeared peaceful. With regard to Japan,

he could not say that Japan would never become a menace to the Empire, but Japan did not constitute such a menace now. Nor did he think that the attitude of America would be anything but a deterrent to the Japanese if they contemplated aggression against ourselves.



At the end of this meeting, the C.I.D. concluded that, while they accepted the C.O.S. report as a general statement of Imperial Defence Policy, it was up to the Cabinet to decide if "this country can afford to make provision to meet its responsibilities".

Churchill's policy, backed by Chamberlain, was accepted. The C.I.D. recommended that "for purposes of framing the estimates of the Fighting Services, that at any given date, there will be no major war for ten years."

This decision, a very curious one, was to be reviewed annually by the C.I.D.<sup>62</sup> before the estimates were drawn up, and the secretary of the C.I.D. was to remind the Prime Minister of the Rule and ask whether it should be placed on the agenda of the Committee. Finally, it was the duty of any of the Departments of the Government, as well as the right of any Dominion Government, to ask the C.I.D. to re-examine the Rule in light of changing conditions.

Almost five years were to pass before the Cabinet could be brought to agree that world conditions had so altered that the Ten Year Rule should be ended.

Considering the prevailing attitude of the government towards defence, as exemplified by their acceptance of the Ten Year Rule and its floating extension, it is not surprising that, aside from a half-hearted commitment to the building of the Singapore Naval Base, little was accomplished to prepare the Fleet for the eventuality of war with Japan.



The tardy steps taken by the Conservative Government to build the Singapore base and to implement the Navy's cruiser replacement programme, were to soon come to a complete halt. In May 1929 the Labour Party under Ramsay MacDonald again became the government. It immediately reaffirmed the Ten Year Rule,<sup>63</sup> and announced the curtailment of the Singapore project.<sup>64</sup>

The attack on the Labour policy concerning Singapore forced the Parliamentary Secretary for Dominion Affairs to inform the House "that when there is a decision on policy; before that time arrives there will be the fullest consultation ... with the Dominions".<sup>65</sup> This was a policy often stated, and just as often not adhered to. Nevertheless the Labour Cabinet decided to postpone the Singapore scheme (rather than cancel it, which would have cost money), pending the results of the soon-to-be convened London Naval Conference.<sup>66</sup> It was all part of MacDonald's sought-after policy of naval disarmament, so dear to his heart. His hopes came a step closer to fruition when President Hoover announced in July 1929 that the United States would reduce her military expenditure, particularly on naval construction. MacDonald, demonstrating British good faith, immediately cancelled the 1928 construction programme, except for those ships already laid down. Hoover, not to be outdone, did likewise with American ships on the stocks, and the game of going one better





was continued by MacDonald, who stated that Britain was ready to cut down her demands in cruiser strength.<sup>67</sup>

The Naval Conference met on January 21, 1930. After some hard bargaining, the United States, Japan and the United Kingdom hammered out a naval limitation treaty, which was signed on April 22. The new agreement extended the Washington tonnage ratios to smaller 'B' type cruisers. The Admiralty, against their better judgment, accepted a cruiser strength of 50, as against the 70 which they had always maintained was the basic minimum for Imperial trade protection and fleet work. Japan achieved a 10:6 ratio in cruisers, and in auxiliary ships obtained a slightly higher ratio, 10:7. It was agreed that no capital ships were to be built by the signatories until 1936.<sup>68</sup>

The optimism that was generated by the success of the London Naval Conference was reflected in some measure at the Imperial Conference of 1930.<sup>69</sup> This met at a moment when world economic conditions were dismal and not surprisingly matters of defence spending had a low priority.

The C.O.S., in preparation for this conference, presented their annual review<sup>70</sup> of Imperial Defence for the years 1929-1930.

They had little new to say. Referring to naval policy, the C.O.S.\* noted that the London Naval Treaty was ratified

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\* In early 1927, it became necessary for the C.O.S.



by all the parties and would govern the strength of the Royal Navy up to December 31, 1936. They quoted one of their own previous epics:

The problem of Imperial Defence arises out of the unique conditions of the British Empire scattered over the globe in every continent and sea ... . If those (sea) communications are closed, they become liable to defeat in detail.<sup>71</sup>

In the circumstances of reducing the size of the Fleet, the importance of defending naval bases became vital to insure the mobility of the Navy. In this context, the base of Singapore was in a category by itself. The time had come to get a lasting settlement of the question.

The Imperial Conference did not, in fact, come to a "final solution" of the Singapore question. What emerged was a compromise which was expressed in a statement that

As a result of discussion... it was recommended that the present policy of the ultimate establishment of a defended naval base at Singapore should be maintained... . It was however, also recommended that ... the remaining expenditure, i.e., that required for completing the equipment of the docks and for defence works, should be postponed for the next five years, when the matter could be again reviewed in the light of relevant conditions then prevailing.<sup>72</sup>

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Committee to have a staff working directly for them, in their corporate capacity, as well as the secretariat function undertaken by the staffs of the C.I.D. Thus, a Joint Planning Committee, consisting of the Directors of Plans of the three Services, was set up as a sub-committee of the C.O.S. Committee. Johnson Op. Cit., p. 202, Stanbridge Op. Cit., p. 29.





The New Zealand Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, welcomed "the various instruments for securing the maintenance of peace", but stressed "that they had not yet been subjected to any test that would justify relying on them in an emergency of the first order of magnitude." As a result of Forbes' attitude towards the assumptions implicit in the Ten Year Rule, the issue was discussed at a meeting of the C.I.D. on November 28, with Forbes and other Dominion representatives in attendance.<sup>73</sup>

MacDonald referred to the present assumptions - that there would be no war for ten years, and that this ten year period moved forward from day to day. "Obviously", MacDonald stated, "this was a very convenient basis on which to conduct defence preparations". The situation was such, however, that no government could adopt a policy of peace with disarmament on hard and fast lines. "Every morning it was necessary to look around and see what changes had occurred during the night, and he felt bound to say, as one who saw all telegrams that came to his government from foreign parts, that he himself sometimes felt rather anxious." Anxious MacDonald might have been, but his disquietude was not yet such as to make him consider that present assumptions regarding defence should be changed. Nevertheless, he would not like to say what his views would be six months hence. "What was wanted", MacDonald said, "was flexibility and not dogmas."

Shortly after MacDonald had met with Forbes, a three-



party committee started deliberations on disarmament. In the course of the meetings, Austen Chamberlain raised the issue of the Ten Year Rule, and wondered if it was still a valid assumption by which the services' estimates were framed, particularly due to unrest in Europe.<sup>74</sup> He again questioned the Ten Year Rule at the fifth meeting of the Committee, and was supported by Sir Samuel Hoare. He gained from MacDonald a promise that the Prime Minister would have the Foreign Office compile a report on the soundness of the assumption in the present international situation.<sup>75</sup> In June 1931, the Foreign Office submitted its report.<sup>76</sup>

This described Europe as "one half dangerously angry and the other half dangerously afraid". The assets of peace during the last ten years, which were founded on the hegemony of France, the power of the victors of the World War, the war weariness of the peoples, and the ideal of international justice, were starting to waste away. The Ten Year Rule was becoming a doubtful proposition. "If the all-important conference of 1932 (on disarmament) should fail; if it should end without agreement being made, in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, it would be difficult to give an opinion that for ten years, no war would break out."

The Foreign Office was not alone in questioning the assumption of peace for ten years. At the first meeting of the three-party committee, the fighting services had been



asked to prepare reports on the state of the armed forces, and how they compared with those of the other major powers.<sup>77</sup>

In April 1931, the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Frederick Field, sent his memorandum on naval defence to the C.I.D.<sup>78</sup>

Field stressed that the Admiralty had accepted a naval strength below what it considered necessary to keep sea communications open in time of war. This had been done for the limited period of the London Naval Treaty, and on the basis that in the interim the international situation would remain stable. The Admiralty with an eye on the forthcoming Naval Conference, made it clear that it could not accept any further reduction of British naval power unless Britain was able to get far greater cut-backs in naval strength by the other nations.

The First Sea Lord presented some alarming figures regarding the drop in British naval strength. In 1918, the Royal Navy possessed 63 capital ships\*. In 1931 it had 15. Most of the 15 were of World War I vintage and badly needed modernization, which the government had as yet refused to finance.

Japan on the other hand, was spending £5 Million to

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\* A capital ship was regarded as any ship of over 10,000 tons displacement mounting guns of over 8". London Naval Treaty, copy in A.C.P. 54.





modernize her capital ships. "The strength of our capital ships", the Admiralty reported, "had been so reduced that should it be necessary to move our fleet to the East, insufficient vessels of this type could be left in home waters to insure the security of our trade and territory in the event of any dispute arising with a European power."

The naval situation in respect to warships other than capital ships was much worse. At the end of the war, Britain had a cruiser strength of 116; now it stood at 50, 20 less than the Admiralty considered the absolute minimum. In 1918, Britain possessed 433 destroyers. That number had shrunk to 120 by 1931, with a replacement rate of only nine a year, and 55 of the 120 were over age. In every category of war material including the Fleet Air Arm, Britain was deficient. The necessity for economy had left the Fleet unable to fully man the ships in full commission and 16,000 men were needed to fill the wardrooms and lower decks to "fight the ships". On the Queen Elizabeth, there was insufficient personnel to man half the 6" guns and this situation "was without parallel in any other navy of importance".

The First Sea Lord concluded with sombre words:

Owing to the operation of the Ten Year decision and the ... demand for economy, our absolute strength in certain directions has been so diminished as to render the Fleet incapable in the event of war to effectively afford protection to our trade.



In a covering memo, Hankey summarized the history<sup>79</sup> of the Ten Year Rule for the C.I.D. He noted that the rule had been applied to the Navy in 1925,<sup>80</sup> on the basis that "in existing circumstances, aggressive action against the British Empire on the part of Japan during the next ten years is not a contingency to be apprehended". Subsequently the Admiralty had decided to postpone the completion date of the naval base at Singapore until 1937.

Hankey stated that the assumption had not been reviewed since the meeting of the C.I.D. after the end of the Imperial Conference of 1930. At that time, while some doubts had been expressed concerning its continued application, it still remained a fundamental part of policy applying to the framing of the service estimates. The whole tenor of Hankey's memorandum was that the rule should be terminated.

On July 15, 1931, the Cabinet reviewed the reports of the C.I.D., Hankey's memorandum, and the Foreign Office summary, and decided that the matter should "again be thoroughly examined in the light of developments in 1932."<sup>81</sup> The MacDonald government was still willing to place its faith in the coming Disarmament Conference. In truth, the Cabinet had little time to carefully consider defence: the domestic and international economic crisis was occupying all its energies; and defence matters, never a high priority for a Labour government, were relegated to the background.

At the beginning of July 1931, the Cabinet was informed





by an internal committee that the deficit for 1932 would amount to £125 million. Unless the budget was balanced, disaster would follow, as foreign confidence in the pound would collapse, and the drain on gold would continue unabated. The committee recommended economies of £96 million, of which £80 million should be slashed from the social services. At a succession of Cabinet meetings held in early August marked by bitterness, anger and division, MacDonald, supported by Snowden, asked for sweeping economies. Arrayed against them were the majority of the government, who as socialists, could not see the unemployment "dole" cut or the imposition of policies more drastic than those the Conservatives proposed. On August 24, MacDonald formed the National Government, composed of Liberal, Conservative and Labour members. Only three Socialists followed him into the Government: Snowden, Lord Sankey and J.H. Thomas. It was in reality a Conservative administration, with Baldwin taking office as Lord President.

The Government, having done the unthinkable by abandoning the Gold Standard and having given up the right to save the pound, called for a general election to legitimize its existence. On October 27, after a particularly bitter campaign, the National Government was returned with an overwhelming majority. But it was to all intents and purposes a Conservative party victory.

The new government was to have little respite. Internally, the economic situation remained bad, with unemployment



at record levels. Internationally, the threatening possibilities that the C.O.S. and the Foreign Office had hinted at became a reality when on September 18, 1931, the Japanese troops of the Kwantung Army started operations to seize Manchuria,<sup>82</sup> and in the following year, set up the puppet state of Manchukuo. This, despite Japan's affirmation in the Nine Power Treaty of 1922 to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of China, and her adherence to the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 renouncing war as an instrument of national policy.

China appealed to the League of Nations, and on September 30, 1931, the League called on Japan to remove her troops from Manchuria, but to no avail. In December, the League appointed a Commission to conduct an inquiry on the spot. The Commission, headed by Lord Lytton, reported that the puppet state of Manchukuo was a creation of the Japanese General Staff, in which the wishes of the local population played no part. On February 24, 1933, the Assembly of the League condemned Japan as an aggressor, whereupon the Japanese delegation walked out.

The Japanese attack on Manchuria was in effect the start of World War II.

During the 1920's, British Naval Strategy in the Far East was based on the Far Eastern War Plan, originally formulated on the basis of conditions existing after the Treaty of Versailles and the Washington naval ratios of 5:5:3.





The plan visualized no opposition to the British Fleet in Europe, and only a small "deterrent force" of three capital ships was provided for European waters. The remainder of the British Fleet was to proceed to the Far East to oppose Japan, the only enemy that was likely to be a threat to the British Empire during this period. However, as work on the War Plan was carried out, doubts were always present as to whether such a large portion of the Fleet would actually be sent away from European waters. The farthest the Navy had ever dispatched large numbers of ships was to the West Indies in the 18th century.<sup>83</sup>

The other component of British Naval Strategy, which was to remain fixed, was the establishment of a first-class naval base in the Far East. Hong Kong was too far forward for its security to be guaranteed, and in addition, it was exposed from the landward side from China. The only other place was Singapore, which, as the Naval Staff stated,

... stands at the Western gateway to the Pacific covering the eastern approaches to India and our other Asiatic possessions, and flanking the route from Eastern Asia to Australia and New Zealand.

It occupies the corresponding position to the British Empire in the East that Gibraltar does in the West and its development had become a necessity in any sound Empire Naval Policy.<sup>84</sup>

Allied with the above strategic assessment was, as Churchill had noted in 1925, the commitment to defend the Pacific Dominions. "I look on it", he declared of the Singapore project, "from the point of view of the South Pacific





and the means of keeping up our communications with Australia, and I think the moral aspect has as much to do with it as any part of the argument."<sup>85</sup>

In the arena of public opinion, the major defence issue which led to debate in Parliament and the press was the Singapore project. It would be tedious and repetitive to give a moment by moment account of the arguments that emerged, but a summary of the several points of view will indicate the postures of those in favour of the base and those against. There were two arguments against: the first stated that the base would cost too much at a time when Britain could ill afford such expense. The editorial writers of the Manchester Guardian stated that the money would be better spent on social improvements, particularly education and housing. In one article, the Guardian, after describing the deplorable state of British schools, commented: "It is to a nation living like this and educating its children under such conditions, that the government declares that it must spend ten or twenty million pounds from the taxes for Singapore."<sup>86</sup>

The Daily Mail took the view that the British needed tax relief and that Singapore was a waste of funds.<sup>87</sup> This opinion was echoed by the Daily Herald, a Labour paper. The second argument attacked on the basis that the base was only to protect British imperial and economic interests in the Far East.<sup>88</sup> The columns of The Times mirrored various arguments for and against the base, though The Times itself came



out in favour of the project.<sup>89</sup> The Parliamentary Debates for the period 1923 to 1930 show that the Singapore base was debated on more than one occasion, with the arguments similar in tone to those presented in the press.<sup>90</sup> One of the most telling arguments in favour of the entire strategic concept of Singapore, was that Britain had a moral obligation to defend the Empire. As Lord Curzon wrote in The Times, when England was in danger, the Pacific Dominions "sent thousands of their men across the ocean to shed their blood in defence of (her interests)". If danger threatened the Dominions, could Britain say that she was too weak or too economical or too timid to extend to them .... defence and protection?"<sup>91</sup> Lord Curzon's forceful argument was reiterated by Churchill in the columns of The Times.<sup>92</sup>

Regardless of all the arguments in favour of the Singapore naval base, the successive governments had exercised extreme caution in proceeding with its development. Much of this caution hinged on financial problems, but in addition there was the continuing worry that the rapid development of the base would anger the Japanese.<sup>93</sup> Thus there was a dichotomy in British strategic thinking: on the one side was the necessity of the base, clearly and lucidly outlined by the O.D.C. in 1920 when they pointed out that as the naval centre had shifted to the Pacific and the Japanese Fleet had become the world's third largest by 1919, a British naval presence had to be maintained east of Suez. Furthermore,





the advances in technology, particularly the shift from coal-burning to oil-burning engines, created a situation where there were not sufficient tankers to keep a British Fleet in the Pacific operational, as there were no local reserves of oil or oil-storage facilities in the Far East.<sup>94</sup>

But unlike successive British governments, the Admiralty took the possibility of war with Japan very seriously. As pointed out by Roskill,<sup>95</sup> every aspect of a conflict with Japan was worked out, including the passage of the Fleet to the Far East.<sup>96</sup> Exercises held in the Mediterranean simulated the conditions that would be faced if the Japanese Fleet was engaged in battle in the Malacca Strait. These exercises were held through the late 1920's. Hong Kong was represented by Gibraltar and Alboran Island off the Algerian Coast represented Singapore. The exercise lasted two months, and since 82 ships were involved, it was probably the most important and realistic exercise carried out in the 1920's.<sup>97</sup>

In these exercises, while carriers were employed by each side, the basis of all British tactical doctrine remained the big ship with big guns. During this period, the Battle of Jutland was still providing the basis for British tactical thinking,<sup>98</sup> and even the submarine menace was ignored.<sup>99</sup>

Overall, the period from 1919-1933 was one of stagnation for the Navy. It limped on, a superficial image of the vast array of ships and power that was the Royal Navy of 1914.

During this time, successive governments had permitted



British naval strength to deteriorate. The Royal Navy was particularly weak in cruisers and auxiliary craft. This was partially due to treaty obligations, but more especially to financial stringency and the policy of carrying out disarmament before any general agreement on this had been reached. By the time the Japanese marched into Manchuria, the British were less equipped to meet a naval war than they had been in 1914. Then, as in 1931, Britain could not carry on a two-ocean war without a staunch naval ally. Unlike the pre-1914 period, she was now alone.

One of the side effects of the policy of financial stringency, aside from reducing the fighting services to near impotence, was that each service separately fought for the meager resources available. It was only when the dangers emerged during the 1930's that the three Chiefs of Staff worked together to get more money for the services.<sup>100</sup>

In addition, there was evident reluctance to rush completion of Singapore, to improve the condition of the Fleet so it could meet the Japanese Fleet with a good chance for success, or to provide adequately for the defence of the base. Significantly, the Singapore project, rather than increasing British power and influence in respect to dealing with Japan, reduced it. The vulnerability of the base, and its prestige factor as a bastion of Imperial Defence, led the C.O.S. to consistently advocate friendship with Japan or at least a soft line towards her.<sup>101</sup>



Part of the explanation for various British Governments' willingness, in fact eagerness to cut down the naval estimates, was based on their acceptance of the validity of the various treaties signed during the decade following the Great War. Not the least of such treaties were those signed at Washington. Not only did the limitation of naval armaments agreed to by the United States, Britain and Japan provide a rationalization for the acceptance and reaffirmation of the Ten Year Rule, it provided a rationale for downgrading the Japanese threat. Yet if the Washington Treaties limited the size of the Royal Navy, they did not curtail its efficiency. They did not limit the development of aircraft carriers nor impinge on the strength of ships other than capital ships. Their provisions did not restrict the development of Fleet Air Arm aircraft. Nor was the freedom to build newer and better cruisers, destroyers or submarines affected. Nothing in the clauses of the Treaties precluded the Admiralty from employing its collective brains or employing the brains of others, to plan and to think of new ways and new methods.





FOOTNOTES

1. Cab. meeting 30/5/21. A.C.P. case 20.
2. C.I.D. 1446 17/06/21. Cab. 4/7.
3. Cab. meeting 22/03/21, A.C.P. case 34.
4. Cab. meeting 30/05/21. A.C.P. case 20.
5. Wm. Roger Louis, British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939, Oxford, 1967, p. 49. Also Chapter 1. For the Alliance: Prime Minister Lloyd George; Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon; Lord President of the Council, Lord Balfour; for renewal with reservations: Secretary of State for Colonies, Winston Churchill; First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Lee. See also Cab. meeting 30/06/21, A.C.P. case 34.
6. This account is based on Imperial Conference Cab. 32/3-32/6, Cab. 21/187, Austen Chamberlain Papers, cases 20, 24 and 34. Balfour Papers 49699, Cab. 4/31. Minutes of the 8th, 9th and 10th meetings of the Imperial Conference; Imperial Conference of 1921, Cmd. 1474. Also J.B. Brebner, "Canada, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and the Washington Conference", Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 50 (March 1935); John S. Galbraith, "The Imperial Conference of 1921 and the Washington Conference", CHR Vol. 29 (June 1948), "Canada in Foreign Affairs - The Japanese Treaty", Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1921. R.A. Mackay, and E.B. Rogers, Canada Looks Abroad, Toronto 1938. H.F. Angus, "Canada and the Naval Rivalry in the Pacific", Pacific Affairs, Vol. 8 (June 1935), A.R.M. Lower, "Loring Christie and the Genesis of the Washington Conference", CHR., Vol. 47 (March 1966). W.F. Whyte, William Morris Hughes, His Life and Times, Sydney, 1957. M.G. Fry, "The North Atlantic Triangle and the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", Journal of Modern History, Vol. 39, March 1967.
7. The British Delegation Records are found in Cab. 30/1/A-33, and Adm. 1/8630. Also see Cab. 30/27; B.P. 49749. An official version is to be found in Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, held at Washington, November 12, 1921, to February 6, 1922. Report of the Canadian Delegate, Ottawa, 1922. See also C.L. Hoag, "Preface to Preparedness", The Washington Conference and Public Opinion, Washington, 1941. Also Y. Ichihashi, The Washington Conference and After, Stanford, 1928.



7. (continued)  
M. and M. Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, Princeton, 1946. J.C. Vinson, The Parchment Peace: The United States and the Washington Conference 1921-1922, Atlanta, 1955. Roskill, Naval Policy ... Op. Cit. Chapter VII.
8. Cmd. 2036, Treaty Series No. 5 (1924).
9. Cmd. 2307, Treaty Series No. 6 (1924).
10. Sprouts, Op. Cit., Chapter IX, also File 74 Cab. 30/1/13.
11. See B.E.D. Adm. 1/8630, Adm. 1/8615, Cab. 30/1/A and 30/1/B, Cab. 30/31. Cab. 30/5, C.I.D. 314B 17/12/21, Adm. 1/6/1776, also Roskill, Naval Policy ... Op. Cit. Chapter VIII, and Sprouts, Op. Cit., Chapter XIII.
12. Tele. 9/12/21 Cab. 30/5, also see Cab. 30/31.
13. Minutes of the B.E.D. 10/12/21 Cab. 30/1/A.
14. See meetings Balfour with Kato, 11/11/21, 22/11/21, Cab. 30/1/A; and Cab. 30/27.
15. Meeting held at the Shoreham Hotel 1/12/21 Cab. 30/1/A.
16. Ibid.
17. P.M. to Balfour, 18/12/21, Cab. 30/5.
18. Cmd. 2037 Treaty Series No. 6 (1924).
19. B.E.D. Minutes 21st Conf. Adm. 1/8630, and Cmd. 2036, Treaty Series No. 5 (1924).
20. Naval Staff History, Vol. I, p. 12, also Adm. Memo "The Japanese as Naval Allies", 17/6/21, incorporating memo by Vice-Admiral W.C. Grant, C in C China Station 5/1/17 in Cab. 24/25.
21. Hughes of Australia was against any limitation of the United States Navy and stated that: "We rejoice over the launching of every new American battleship - it is another brick in the citadel of our safety." W.A. Gardner, "Some American Naval Views", For. Rels, Vol. 113, (March 1923) p. 359. Hughes also stated that: "Every new U.S. warship is an addition to the security of the British Empire", quoted in Lt. Cdr. J.M.





21. (continued)  
Kenworthy, Royal Navy, "The New Entente" Adm. File PNS 142, 1929, p. 90. Mr. Gardner was Vice President of the United States Navy League. See also A. Hurd "The American Fleet's Cruise in the Pacific", For. Rels. Vol. 117 (July 1925)., and Imp. Conference, meeting of delegates 28/6/21, Cab. 32/2.
22. Adm. One Power Standard, 1928, also memo First Sea Lord 30/11/22, Cab. 2/3.
23. Davis, F. and E.K. Lindley, How War Came to America, N.Y. 1942, p. 275; Rear/Admiral S.E. Morison, U.S.N., The Rising Sun in the Pacific, Washington, 1952, pp. XIII-XIV. Aside from Roskill Naval Policy ... Op. Cit., some other British attitudes to the U.S.N. are found in A. Hurd, "The U.S. and Sea Power, A Challenge", For. Rels. Vol. 108 (NN 1923) and F. Moore, America's Naval Challenge, N.Y. 1929.
24. Empire Naval Co-operation, C.I.D. 131-C 25/4/21, Cab. 21/187.
25. Adm. 1/8702 - 149/26.
26. Meeting, Imperial Delegates 28/6/21, Cab. 32/2.
27. Ibid., also Papers E1 - E56, Imp. Conf. 1921, Vol. II, Cab. 32/2. Hughes later told the Australian Parliament, "He (Lord Beatty) told us too ... a fact which I think will be fairly obvious to Hon. Members if they will look at a map - that if it were not there (Singapore), Australia would be helpless if attacked." Commonwealth Debates, 30/7/23, Vol. 104, p. 178. See also G.L. Davis, A Navy Second to None, N.Y. 1940, p. 279.
28. Roskill, Naval Policy ... Op. Cit.
29. C.I.D. 195-C Australia, and 196-C New Zealand, 11/6/23, also 192-C, 7/6/23.
30. Section XII, Cmd. 1897; Proceedings of Imperial Conference, Cab. 32/7 to Cab. 32/37. Also "Naval Problems", Round Table, Vol. XIV, 1924. p. 85960.
31. Cab. C.P. 15 (24), 20/2/24.
32. Cab. R.S. (24), First Meeting 27/2/24.
33. Cab. 21 (24) 17/3/24. Also Parliamentary Debates, Commons 18/3/24, Vol. 171, Col. 319. Singapore Naval Base Cmd. 2083, 1924, p. 7.

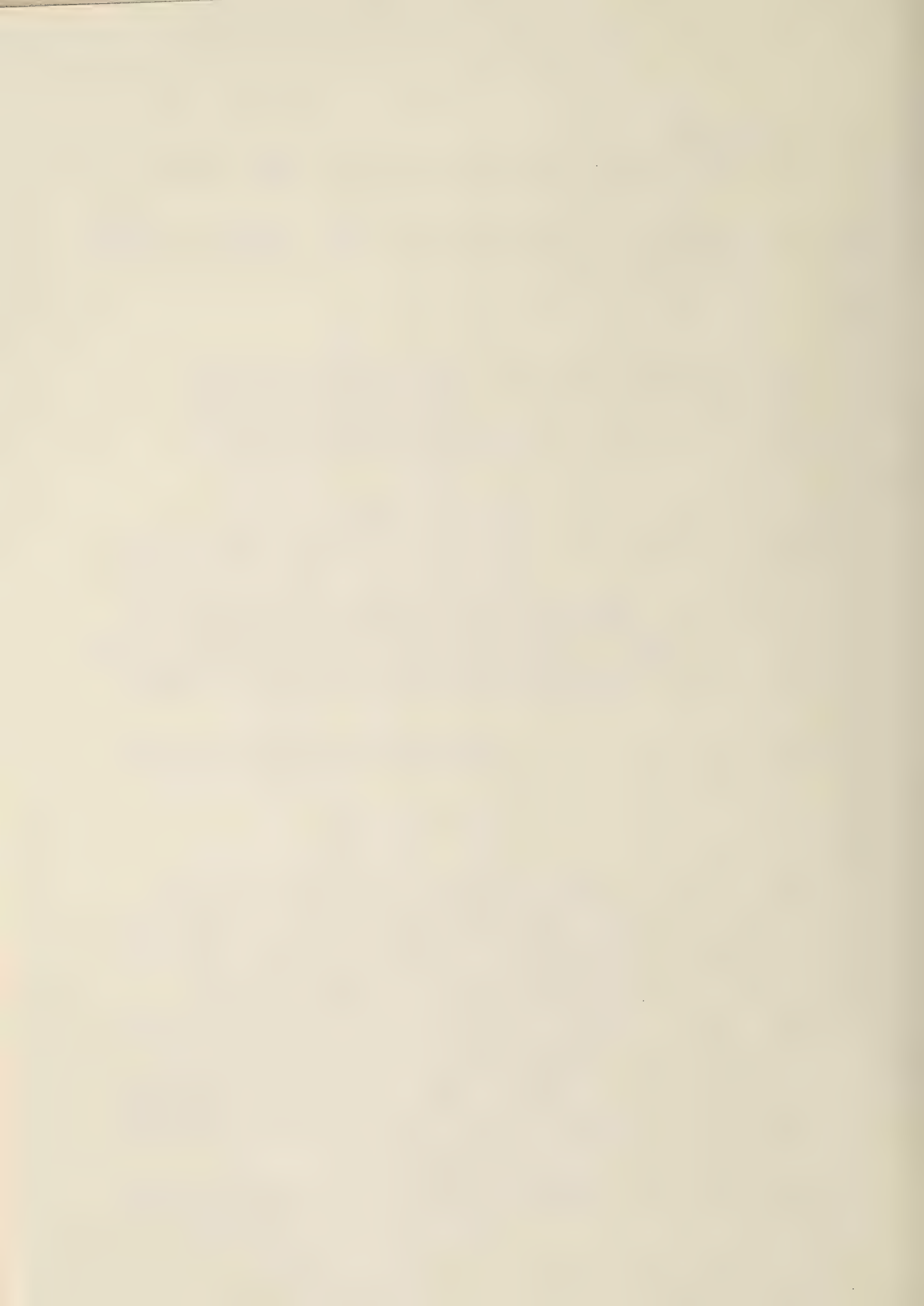


34. Cab. 64 (24), 26/11/24.
35. Cab. 64 (24), 25/11/24.
36. C.P. 39 (25), 11/01/25.
37. See also Churchill's comments during the 193rd meeting, 5/1/25, Cab. 2/4.
38. C.I.D. 198th meeting, 30/3/25, Cab. 2/4.
39. C.I.D. 1055-B, 23/6/31. Cab. 4/21, also C.I.D. 199th meeting, 2/4/25, 2/4, also C.I.D. 193rd meeting Op. Cit. See also 198th meeting, Op. Cit.
40. Cmd. 2476, 27/7/25. Note had to be taken of the fact that the decision to build 8" cruisers was based on matching the Japanese cruisers of similar size. The Admiralty had to face, however, the economies of a cut back in manning the fleet and the no-alternation policy for heavy ships over fifteen years old.
41. Bd. Minute No. 2247, 7/10/26, Adm. 167/73, also C.I.D. 193rd meeting 5/1/25, Op. Cit.
42. C.I.D. 193rd Meeting, Op. Cit.
43. Interim Report, C.I.D. 176-C, 12/2/25, Cab. 16/63. The Minutes of the committee's meetings and the Reports submitted to the C.I.D. are to be found in Cab. 16/63 under S.P. (25).
44. C.P. (25) 12, 2/3/25.
45. C.I.D. 249-C, 25/7/25, Cab. 16/65.
46. See S.P. (25) 3, to S.P. (25) 17, for the arguments over time of arrival of the Main Fleet, and Defences, and for the argument between the C.A.S. and Admiralty concerning Singapore Defences.
47. C.I.D. 700-B, and 701-B, June 1926, Cab. 4/14.
48. C.I.D. 215th meeting, 22/7/26, Cab. 2/5.
49. Summary of Proceedings at the 1926 Imperial Conference, Cmd. 2768, p. 407.
50. C.I.D. 229th meeting, 14/7/27 Cab. 2/5, C.I.D. 290-C



50. (continued)  
Jan. 1927, Cab. 4/16, C.I.D. 226th meeting, 5/5/27,  
Cab. 2/5, also Cab. 50 (26) 2, 8/8/26.
51. C.I.D. 312-C, 7/3/28, and C.I.D. 234th meeting, 29/3/28,  
Cab. 2/5; also C.I.D. 304-C, Cab. 4/17, also Adm. memo  
31/11/27, Cab. 4/17.
52. C.I.D. 234th meeting 29/3/28, Op. Cit.
53. For the discussion concerning the defences, see C.I.D.  
312-C, 7/3/28, Cab. 4/7, C.I.D. meeting, 29/3/28,  
Cab. 2/5, C.O.S. 61st meeting 7/2/28, Cab. 53/2 -  
for the graving dock see London Times 1/6/28,  
6/8/28, 13/10/28, 17/10/28 and Debates, House of  
Commons, Vol. 226, Col. 1091-92.
54. Bd. Minute, 2391 3/11/27, Adm. 167/75.
55. Debates, House of Commons, Vol. 210, Col. 1013 and 1772.
56. Churchill to Bridgeman, 16/1/28 Adm. 167/76. In 1927,  
the Cabinet reaffirmed that the British Empire would  
not be engaged in a European war for the next ten years.  
Imperial Defence Preparations, C.I.D. 1055-B, 23/6/31.  
See also postponement of Air Force Expansion in 1925,  
Cab. 57 (25), 3/12/25.
57. Quoted in C.I.D. 1055-B, Op. Cit. and also Cab. 4/17.
58. C.I.D. 1091-B, Cab. 4/17.
59. C.I.D. 236th Meeting, 5/7/28, Cab. 2/5.
60. Ibid. Churchill, in his history of the Second World  
War, wrote: "It has been contended that the acceptance  
of this principle lulled the Fighting Departments into  
a false sense of security ... and only short term views  
prevailed, especially where expense was involved.  
Up till the time I left office in 1929, I felt so  
hopeful that the peace of the world would be maintained  
that I saw no reason to take any new decision; nor in  
the event was I proved wrong. War did not break out  
till the autumn of 1939." W.S. Churchill, The Second  
World War, Vol. 1, London, 1948. p. 40. What Churchill  
neglects to mention was that the fighting services had  
fallen into such a state of unpreparedness that by  
1939 they were far from ready for a war.
61. Chamberlain, who became First Lord on August 27, 1931,





61. (continued)  
to November 9, 1931, always hankered after the position during the formation of Bonar Laws Government in 1922, and seemed to have consistently taken an anti-Admiralty line when Foreign Secretary. See A.C.P. 54, particularly dealing with London Naval Conference and A.C. 34 which deals with Washington Conference. Also, Sir Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, London, 1929, Vol. 1, p. 24.
62. The Decision was reaffirmed in 1929 and 1930. C.I.D. 243rd Meeting, 27/6/29, Cab. 2/5, Cab. 4 (28); C.I.D. 249th Meeting, 14/7/30, Cab. 2/5 and Cab. 52 (29) 3, 11/12/29.
63. C.I.D. 243rd Meeting, 27/6/29, Cab. 2/5.
64. Debates. House of Commons, Vol. 231, Col. 2013.
65. Debates: House of Commons, Vol. 232, Col. 858.
66. Cab. 45 (29) 5, 29/10/29, C.I.D. 239th meeting, 13/12/28, Cab. 2/5, and C.I.D. 344-C, 30/4/30, Cab. 4/20 and 2/5. For the British Government's view, see A.C.P., Case 54.
67. See Naval Staff Memo 31/1/29, A.C.P. Case 54 and Austen Chamberlain to Bridgeman 1/2/29, A.C.P. Case 54.
68. Memo to Chamberlain, 20/4/29, A.C.P. Case 54. Also U.S. Foreign Relations, 1930, Vol. 1, pp. 107-125. For negotiations and correspondence pp. 1-131, also J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, Disarmament and Security, London, 1932, pp. 127-124, and G. Engely (trans. H.V. Rhodes), The Policies of Naval Disarmament, London, 1932, Chaps. I, II, III.
69. France and Italy refused to sign the Treaty due to their own particular rivalry in the Mediterranean. The Treaty also contained an "escalator clause" which allowed Britain to start construction of new ships if France or Italy should threaten the traditional British policy or naval equality with the combined European naval powers. See U.S. Foreign Relations, 1930, Vol. 1, pp. 107-125.
70. C.I.D. 1009-B, 29/7/30, Cab. 4/20 and C.O.S. 247, Cab. 53/21.
71. C.I.D. 701-B, Cab. 4/15 and C.O.S. 41st Meeting, Cab. 53/12.



72. Cab. 45 (29) 5, 29/10/29, also C.I.D. 249th Meeting, 13/12/29, Cab. 2/5.
73. C.I.D. 251st Meeting, 28/11/30, Cab. 2/5. For the views of the Pacific Dominions, see C.I.D. 354-C, also N.Z. H.C. Sir Thomas Wilford, C.I.D. 256th Meeting, 9/6/32, Cab. 2/5.
74. D.C.(P) 3rd Meeting, 7/5/31.
75. D.C.(P) 4th Meeting, 14/5/31.
76. C.I.D. 1056-B, 25/6/31, Cab. 4/21. Hankey had sent a note to the Cabinet stating that the Ten Year Rule should be ended - memo 9/1/31, Cab. 63/44. It had been ignored.
77. D.C. (P) 1st Meeting, 1/4/31.
78. C.P. 100 (31), and C.I.D. 1047-B 14/4/31, Cab. 4/21.
79. C.I.D. 1055-B 23/6/31, Cab. 4/21.  
The Chief of Air Staff also submitted a report on the R.A.F., C.I.D. 1084-B, also C.P. 108 (31) D.C. (P) 11, 10/4/31, in which he claimed that Japanese air technology was not as efficient as that of the United Kingdom or the United States, and until she exhibited a higher level of technical efficiency, she "could only be considered a second class air power". Japanese pilots had a high standard of courage and discipline, but were lacking in initiative and mechanical sense.
80. Cab. 9 (25) 2, 9/2/25.
81. Cab. 38 (31), 15/7/31.
82. For the diplomacy of this period including the Japanese attack on Manchuria, see A.C.P. Case 42; also F.C. Jones, Japan's New Order in East Asia, 1937-45, London, 1954; also Political and Foreign Relations of the United States, 1931-1941, Japan, Washington 1943; A.J. Toynbee, S.I.A., 1932, and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1939, Vol. II, and and 70 F72767/1307/10 and F27818/5189/61.  
Also see W.W. Willoughby, The Sino Japanese Controversy and the League of Nations, Baltimore, 1935. Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1931-1941, Japan, Washington, 1943. F.R. Scott, Canada Today, London, 1948. pp. 44-47. B. Lasker, W.C. Holland, Ottawa Co-operative Attempt at Recovery,





82. (continued)  
Institute of Pacific Relations Conference 1933, P. 210.  
Joseph C. Grew, Ten Years in Japan, N.Y. 1944.  
Joseph C. Grew, Report from Tokyo, N.Y. 1943.  
Sir Robert Craigie, Behind the Japanese Mask, London, N.D.
83. See War Memo in Cab. 55/10, Cab. 8/8 and Far Eastern War Plans, Adm. Record Case 00215.
84. Notes by naval members of O.D.C. 5/5/21. O.D.C. No. 63, Cab. 8/8.
85. C.I.D. 193rd Meeting, 5/1/25, Cab. 2/4.
86. "Singapore - Expense and British Slums", Manchester Guardian, 11/5/23.
87. Daily Mail, 6/3/25.
88. Daily Herald, 10/4/23.
89. Times, 13/11/23.
90. Statements representative of the opposition viewpoint may be found in Great Britain Commons, Debates, 9/12/24, Vol. 179; 19/3/25, Vol. 181; 23/3/25 Vol. 182; 22/3/26, Vol. 193 Great Britain Lords Debates 1/7/25, Vol. 61. London Daily Mail, 6/3/25; Daily News, 20/3/25; and 24/3/25. Daily Herald 22/1/25. Statements in favour of the base: Great Britain, Commons, Debates, 9/12/24, Vol. 179; 23/2/25, Vol. 180; 19/3/25, Vol. 181; 22/3/26, Vol. 193: Great Britain Lords Debates 4/3/25. Vol. 60; London Times, 1/12/24; 22/1/25; 28/1/25; 24/3/25; 7/11/25.
91. Lord Curzon, London Times, 29/3/24.
92. Ibid.
93. Louis Op. Cit., p. 20.
94. Memo O.D.C. The Singapore Base, 30/5/30, Cab. 21/335.
95. Roskill, Naval Policy ... Op. Cit., pp. 537-38.
96. Roskill, Op. Cit., pp. 537-38; see for example the paper exercise of passage of the Fleet via the Cape. File M03410/34. Adm. 1/9530.



97. Roskill, Op. Cit., p. 538, London Times, 13, 23, 30/3/28, also Brassey's Naval Annual, 1929.
98. For Example the Wolf Pack Submarine attack of World War II "was a tactic to which the Navy had no answer, even though in the similar conditions of 1918, we had worked out how such attacks could be frustrated". Lt./Cdn. P. Kemp, R.N. (Rtd). "War Studies in the Royal Navy", JRUSI, Vol. III, May 1966, p. 152.
99. S. Roskill, The War At Sea, Vol. III, pt. II, London, 1961, p. 406. (hereafter Roskill, Vol. III), p. 395-398, also S. Roskill, Vol. I, pp. 105-106.
100. Johnson, Op. Cit. pp. 201-202.
101. See for example C.P., 12 (36), 17/1/36.



CHAPTER IV

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND REARMAMENT, AND THE NAVAL  
DEFENCE OF THE FAR EAST, 1932-1937

The tense Far Eastern situation signalled the start of a long, protracted battle within the C.O.S., the C.I.D. and the Cabinet over the continuation of the Ten Year Rule.

On February 23, 1932, the C.O.S. submitted a strategic appreciation on the Far East to the C.I.D.<sup>1</sup> They stated bluntly that the times and circumstances demanded a re-evaluation of the Ten Year Rule, pointing out that the basis of the Rule that Britain would have ten years to "recover its position" was too optimistic. British naval strength in the Far East was too weak to counter any Japanese moves against British interests, and this sorry state of affairs was compounded by the lack of defences at Singapore. "There is nothing new in this situation", the C.O.S. reported, with total truth. "The records of the C.I.D. show that in every year since 1919, the weakness of our situation in the Far East had been brought to the notice of successive governments, and since 1926 in our own annual reviews."<sup>2</sup>

This report was the opening salvo in the battle between the fighting services and the Treasury over defence spending. Even while the C.O.S. were preparing their assessment, the Treasury were composing their rebuttal to demands that the service estimates be increased.<sup>3</sup> They asked whether, even





if Japan was disturbing the peace of the world, the British Government was prepared to do anything about it by engaging in major operations in Far Eastern waters. And did the Japanese believe that Britain was even prepared to do so? Obviously not, stated the Treasury. Britain was in no position financially or economically to engage in a major war in the Far East. Furthermore, the Treasury did not believe that British military weakness would lead to diplomatic disadvantages. Their assessment was that there was only a slight danger from Japan, and that this could be conveniently ignored. Public opinion would not tolerate increased defence spending. If the financial position improved, the Treasury would not object to a review of the provision for the services; but at present, "the financial and economic risks are by far the most serious and urgent that the country has to face, and other risks must be run until the country has had the time and opportunity to recuperate".

The C.I.D. examined both reports at their March 22 meeting,<sup>4</sup> and agreed to recommend to the Government that either the Ten Year Rule be ended, or that the assumption of ten years of peace be reduced to five. The suddenness of Japanese action in Manchuria, the impotence of the League of Nations, and the Japanese flaunting of world opinion suggested that Japan might well strike at British interests, much as they had moved against Russia in 1904. "We urge



with conviction", continued the C.I.D., "that it would be the height of folly to allow our defenceless situation in the Far East to continue." The general effect of the Ten Year Rule is that "we are in measurable distance of catastrophe, in every place we are unable to meet any of our commitments".<sup>5</sup> The Navy was weaker than it had ever been, and also, as the C.O.S. had pointed out since 1924, the Government had expended £700 million on public works and unemployment, one per cent of this sum would have made a great difference to British military strength. But the assumption of ten years of peace had become an insurmountable barrier to the execution of any policy of Imperial Defence, "no matter how urgent might be the necessity". As a result of the Ten Year Rule, the arms industry had shrunk to a fraction of what it had been.

The C.I.D.'s conclusion was that the Ten Year Rule had to go. It was contrary to the lessons of history, and had no counterpart anywhere. A concerted effort had to be made to swing public opinion away from pacifism and towards the necessity for defence spending. Remedial action could not be delayed until the results of the Disarmament Conference were known, for time was running short.

The Disarmament Conference, on which the National Government placed so much hope, met in February 1932, and continued into 1933.<sup>6</sup> In the field of naval disarmament, the results were dismal. The major naval powers, Britain, Japan and the





United States, held conversations to attempt to find a basis for a renewal of the London Naval Treaty of 1932, but their hopes foundered on the rocks of Japanese demands for naval parity and the abolition of long-range battleships and cruisers. In June 1934 the negotiations broke down. On December 29, 1934, Japan informed the United States that she would terminate the London Naval Treaty on December 31, 1936.

The failure of the Conference forced MacDonald to accept, unwillingly, the necessity for rearmament. But in one respect the Treasury was correct: public opinion was against the expenditure of vast sums on the defence forces. Nor were the British, now weary of the depression and of misplaced hopes, ready to agree to any foreign commitments.<sup>7</sup> It was the time of the Oxford Union Resolution which vowed not to fight for 'King and Country'. It was the time of the East Fulham by-election of June 1933, when a Labour candidate, fighting on a largely anti-armaments platform, beat the incumbent Conservative by a large majority. It was the time, as Hankey and the C.O.S. had already noted, that the Government had to begin to change public opinion about the necessity of defence and the duty to serve. But no British Government was willing to take up this task.

Yet events were emerging that would eventually force the British to accept some rearmament. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.



In London, the C.I.D. kept repeating what they had so often said before: that a fleet could not, in the existing circumstances, move to the Far East. Singapore was still not ready; the vital trade routes to the East, the coast of India and British territory in the Far East, were exposed to attack. "We have no reason to impute aggressive intentions to Japan unless she is goaded into precipitate action", noted the C.I.D., "yet she has shown herself disquietingly adept at surprise attacks, and the state of British preparations would be a great temptation to another aggressively-minded power."<sup>8</sup>

Hankey, angry that the Cabinet had not yet formally ended the Ten Year Rule, wrote to Neville Chamberlain\*, Chancellor of the Exchequer,<sup>9</sup> stating that regardless of what the Treasury thought about the financial risks of rearmament, the British arms industry was dying, and resuscitation was almost impossible. Hankey repeated this to the Prime Minister.<sup>10</sup> In 1914, he told him, there were eleven firms capable of producing heavy armament.<sup>11</sup> Now, in 1933, only one existed. The prime manufacturer of gun-forgings was out of business. On the Clydeside and the Tyne, the home of the ship-building industry, 80% of the work force was unemployed.

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\* Chamberlain had become Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1931.



Hankey's letters were followed by yet another report from the C.O.S. on the Far Eastern situation.<sup>12</sup> Dated March 31, 1933, it claimed that at the time of the Shanghai crisis, Japan had planned to attack Singapore.

The C.I.D. discussed this somewhat alarming report a week later.<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain reiterated that, while he was greatly impressed by the C.O.S. case, he still believed that the risks of the financial situation were more pressing than the risks of Japanese aggression. He was willing to concede that perhaps something should be done to prepare Singapore against attack. But Prime Minister MacDonald made it clear that Chamberlain's minor concession was not to be interpreted as a guarantee of increase in defence expenditure. "This", he said, "was out of the question".

The meeting concluded by proposing that the Singapore project be completed by 1936, instead of 1938, and that the services work out emergency plans for the defence of the base in case of war arising before the completion of the defences. These recommendations were approved by the Cabinet a week later.<sup>14</sup>

During the latter months of 1933, the C.O.S. and other government departments were engaged in the Annual Review of Imperial Defence. Their main intention was to get the Ten Year Rule terminated by the Cabinet, and serious rearmament undertaken.

The emerging threat from Germany was starting to bring to the fore the basic strategic problem that Britain had





faced before 1914: how to defend a two-ocean empire without allies and with a one-ocean navy.

Aside from the weakness in ships, men and material, Singapore was not ready; and the Admiralty's plans for a Far Eastern war were compromised by a serious lack of oil-tankers to maintain the Fleet.<sup>15</sup> Chatfield, First Sea Lord Lord, noted<sup>16</sup> that "while the Chancellor states that the financial dangers are greater than the military ones, we (the C.O.S.) have to tell the true story, that the naval estimates for the past seven years were below that danger point. If the Ten Year Rule had helped save £30 to £40 millions of the service estimates, the situation was now that even if it were ended, there existed no safeguards for British defence; and unless we are willing to pay, there is no way the position can be regained."

On September 15, 1933, Chatfield wrote to Hankey

Although the Admiralty know that we are terribly deficient in many ways, we have never given the Cabinet full details of it. Last year my predecessor, Sir Frederick Field, definitely refrained from informing the Cabinet of the extent of these weaknesses due to continual reduction in naval estimates.

How much longer, Chatfield asked, could we hide our needs?

Meanwhile, as part of the Annual Review, the Foreign Office submitted its appraisal of the world situation.<sup>18</sup> The report spoke of the German menace, and contained a comment



which would have great strategic implication: that "it was no longer possible to allow the Far East to entirely absorb our attention, as might perhaps be inferred from our Review of 1930".\* The Review noted that the basic principles of British foreign policy, support of the League of Nations and world disarmament, were now discredited. The League had proved ineffective in dealing with Japan and disarmament had failed. The time had come for a fresh approach.

On October 12, 1933, the C.O.S. presented its Annual Review of Imperial Defence.<sup>19</sup> The preamble travelled over the well-trodden ground, and pointed out yet again that the first principle of Imperial Defence was the maintenance of sea communications, and that it was the duty of the United Kingdom to defend the Dominions and Territories if they were attacked. It had been accepted policy for a decade that the Admiralty had to be prepared to send a fleet to the Far East, retaining in home waters a small force of a few capital ships, destroyers and submarines. This policy had been feasible because at the time of the Washington Treaty, the British possessed a sufficient margin over the Japanese Fleet to retain in European waters a fleet equal with France, while

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\* The Report reflected the views of Sir Horace Rumbold, the retiring British Ambassador to Berlin; Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Undersecretary; Duncan Sandys, Third Secretary in Berlin; and Ralph Wigram, of the Central Department of the Foreign Office.





dispatching to the Far East a force slightly superior to that of the Japanese. Now, the strength of the Navy had so declined that in the event of a two-ocean war, the C.O.S. were "forced to the conclusion ... we could do little more than hold the frontiers and outposts of the Empire in the first few months of the war". In a war with Japan, in which the main burden would fall on the Navy, the Fleet was 40% short of oil reserves, deficient in ammunition, anti-submarine equipment, mines and defended bases. Only if Britain had an Alliance with France against Germany could a fleet be sent to the Far East to meet Japan. There was a shortage of twenty cruisers within the fleet, however, as well as other classes of warship other than capital ships.

The Review was a lament for the demise of Britain's ability to defend her interests or her Empire. The defence of British interests could only be carried out by the provision and operation of the main fleet in the Far East strong enough to meet the Japanese at a selected moment; and behind the cover of the main fleet, the protection of British sea communications with the Dominions, India, the Colonial Empire and the world could be secured.

But the greatest time of danger would be in 1936, when the Japanese would have completed their capital ships modernization programme, while the Royal Navy would be short of three major fleet units which would be undergoing large repairs. There was therefore a need to accelerate the modernization of



British ships and to build the 20 cruisers in order to protect the trade-routes from Japanese raiders.<sup>20</sup>

The C.O.S. listed what they felt were the three main British strategic priorities in order of importance: the Far East, Europe and India. Unless the Government was prepared to spend more on the fighting services, they would be in worse shape to meet these commitments in five years than they were now, and they were too weak even at present.

They concluded by quoting their own 1932 report which urged the cancellation of the Ten Year Rule and recommended that a start be made to provide for the defence of naval bases, first priority being British interests in the Far East. Now, a year later, a decision on this was needed immediately, for as the events in the Far East demonstrated, Britain "cannot ignore the writing on the wall".

On November 9, 1933, the C.I.D. met with the Prime Minister in the chair,<sup>21</sup> to discuss the Annual Review. The meeting progressed in an atmosphere of pessimism and hedging. Chatfield urged his case strongly, and stated that "he hoped the committee realized the very serious nature of the position".<sup>22</sup> Chamberlain then asked the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.), Lord Milne, how long it would take Germany to get ready for war. Milne thought that Germany would be ready to go to war as early as 1938.<sup>23</sup> He added that Britain could not fight a two-ocean war, and thus strongly recommended that friendly relations with Japan be re-established.



Chamberlain concurred. He felt that the ending of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had "poisoned" British-Japanese relations, and had led Japan to regard Britain with mounting suspicion.

Personally, he (Chamberlain) was very impressed with the fact that Japan had given notice to leave the League and that Germany had done the same. He would like to know how to estimate the situation if a position arose when Germany and Japan might come together, and it seemed to him such a situation was conceivable when Germany was sufficiently strong to take a hand against us. He thought that it would be a very alarming prospect.

But, regardless of his worry about this alarming prospect, Chamberlain was not ready to agree to full-scale rearmament. He asked the members of the C.I.D. if it was possible to eliminate certain powers from the list of potential enemies, and thus avoid expenditure to rearm against them. He himself listed France, Italy, and the United States as nations that could be left out of the C.O.S.'s calculations for the next six to ten years. He also questioned the priority given to the Far East, as the European situation appeared "so fluid". He wanted relations with Japan along the lines suggested by Lord Milne, as he felt that Japan had no aggressive tendencies toward the United Kingdom. If this was so, then the Far East could be downgraded as a danger area. Sir John Simon, arguing with more perception than he was later to show in respect to Germany, claimed that in five years Japan and Germany would "come together".

The arguments went back and forth: was the Far East to get first priority, was Japan a danger to the United Kingdom? The meeting concluded by recommending that the strategic priorities of the Review be accepted, and that a new committee





be established to be called the Defence Requirements Committee, which was to prepare a report on a programme to meet the worst deficiencies of the fighting services. It agreed also that Italy, France, and the United States would not be considered enemies "to be provided against".

On November 15, 1933, the Cabinet discussed these C.I.D. recommendations, and approved them.<sup>24</sup> But MacDonald also warned the members of the D.R.C., which had met for the first time the previous day, that there would be no automatic Cabinet approval of their recommendations, particularly if these involved large sums of money.<sup>25</sup>

Hankey was elected to the powerful position of Chairman of the D.R.C.\* and under his firm control, the Committee immediately got down to business. While only a sub-committee

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\* The D.R.C.'s reports were considered by the Ministerial Disarmament Committee. (M.C.(D) 32, chaired by the Prime Minister, or in his absence, the Lord Privy Seal. The reports also could go directly to the Cabinet. On July 8, 1935, the M.C.(D) was reconstituted as the Defence Policy Requirements Committee D.P.(R), chaired by the President of the Board of Trade. A few months later, due to the Mediterranean crisis, the Prime Minister took the Chair, and the D.P.(R) Committee became in effect a "war Cabinet" and was close to being an inner circle of the C.I.D. At the end of the crisis, the experience led the Prime Minister to establish the defence plans (Policy) Committee D.P.(P), separate from the D.P.(R) which went back to its normal work, with himself or a deputy in Chair, and consisting of Senior Ministers and the C.O.S. In February 1936, Sir Thomas Inskip was appointed Minister for Co-ordination of Defence and Chaired the D.P.(R) and D.P. and (Policy) Committees and became Deputy Chairman of the C.I.D. and the C.O.S. Committee. In April 1939, a powerful Ministerial Priority Committee was established and



of the C.I.D., it had great importance, for it had to establish strategic priorities which would provide the framework for the rearmament programme. The Committee was made up of the Service Chiefs; Warren Fisher (Treasury)\*; Robert Vansittart (Foreign Office); Chief of Naval Staff(C.N.S.), Chief of Air Staff (C.A.S.), and the C.I.G.S.; and it soon became the venue where the services presented their strategic assumptions in terms of material requirements. Thus the D.R.C. meetings reflected what each Service department considered its role, policy and strategic plans.

When the D.R.C. was established, its terms of reference, as given by the Cabinet, were based on the recommendations of the meeting of the C.I.D. of November 9, 1933. Part of these were the order of priorities of British defence policy: the Far East first; Europe, particularly Germany, second (as the greatest potential danger); and, perhaps surprisingly, the defence of India against the U.S.S.R. But there was an important constraint: rearmament was not to interfere with normal industrial activities.<sup>26</sup>

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in August a Ministry of Supply was established. See John Ehrman, Cabinet Government and War, 1890-1940, London, 1969, pp. 115-120; also J.D. Scott and R. Hughes, The Administration of War Production, London, 1955, pp. 56-65. Also Cab. 16/123, and Cab. 62(33) 15/11/35.

- \* There needs to be a good study of Fisher, whose power at the Treasury seemed to be all-embracing and all-persuasive. As a member of the key Defence Policy and Requirements Committee, he played a key part in the formulation of British Rearmament policy.





It did not take long for this sequence of "priorities" to be questioned. At the third meeting of the D.R.C.<sup>27</sup>, Vansittart, already fearful of Germany, told its members that Germany must precede Japan as enemy number one. Britain he said, did not have the resources to fight a two-ocean war. Hankey was equally adamant for retaining Japan as the major threat. The Service Chiefs were uncertain.

As the argument went back and forth in the committee, Fisher and Vansittart were ranged against Chatfield and Hankey. The first two argued that British losses in the Far East would be serious, but not disastrous; but that only Germany could destroy the Empire by striking at Britain. The counter-argument stated that Britain had an absolute commitment to protect her Far Eastern Empire, including the Pacific Dominions. It was therefore imperative that the policy of having a navy strong enough to secure home waters while sending a fleet to the Far East be maintained. The only alternative to building up the navy to sufficient strength in order to accomplish these two missions was to establish good relations with Japan. Fisher had the last word. He made the point that if Britain was strong in Europe, she would be in a far better position to work out an arrangement with the Japanese who respected power. The meeting ended on a compromise. Until 1936, i.e. for three years, Singapore was to be afforded the first priority in defence planning and rearmament, for on that base hinged the whole defence of the Far East. Germany was regarded as the greater potential threat, and would be the nation against which British defence preparations should be made.



Few can now argue that Germany was not the chief danger. What can be argued was the unwillingness of the Treasury and the Cabinet to rearm with serious intent even against Germany. As far as the Navy was concerned, its deficiencies were no longer concealed from the Cabinet. Its ships needed modernization, particularly the old World War I ships such as Warspite, Malaya, Queen Elizabeth, Royal Oak, and Valiant. With the exception of Eagle, not one carrier had a full complement of aircraft. The Fleet was clearly not capable of fighting any war whatever.<sup>28</sup>

In subsequent meetings of the D.R.C., Fisher continued to argue his case.<sup>29</sup> This was based on two criteria. The first was money. For the Royal Navy to be prepared for a Far Eastern war would require a large outlay to modernize the existing Fleet, as would the construction of new capital ships to replace the older ones still in service. This programme could not be completed until 1945; i.e. in ten years time. Fisher's solution was to rely on the R.A.F. as the chief arm of British defence, to prepare for war against Germany and to cultivate good relations with Japan. To achieve the latter, it would be necessary to "get away from subservience to the United States of America" on the one hand, while being strong enough to "show a tooth" on the other. Britain had to choose between Imperial commitments and a European war, for each had different requirements in terms of defence preparations.<sup>30</sup>

Fisher eventually did reluctantly agree that it was necessary to modernize the Fleet to meet the contingencies of a Far Eastern War. He did not, however, retreat from his position that Britain had to get rid of the "alliance" with the United States.<sup>31</sup> To Fisher, American policy was to keep





Britain weak. It would be wiser, he stated, to let the Americans build a huge fleet and "see how long the Middle West will pay for vanity". Nor was he willing to commit the Treasury in advance to pay the extra sixty or seventy million pounds for naval construction.<sup>32</sup>

Fisher's views were in complete accord with Chamberlain's, who wrote in his diary that "we cannot provide simultaneously for hostilities with Japan and Germany .<sup>33</sup> And he inclined towards a non-aggression pact with Japan

But there was a wider implication to Fisher's views: that Britain's Far Eastern Empire and the Pacific Dominions could, if necessary, be sacrificed on the altar of European expediency.<sup>34</sup>

On February 28, 1934, the D.R.C., having digested all the arguments presented its first report.<sup>35</sup> This agreed that it was impossible to defend the whole of the Empire against attack.

The minimum requirements of the Navy, which had already been outlined by the C.O.S. in 1933, "were to be able to send to the Far East a fleet of sufficient size to cover against the Japanese fleet", in order to protect British trade and interests in that part of the globe, as well as to have a sufficient margin to secure home waters against a European power. To ensure that condition, the D.R.C. insisted, British diplomacy must be directed to prevent an alliance of Germany with Japan, and to secure allies for Britain.

Germany's claim to naval parity with France seriously challenged the whole basis of the "one-power standard". As long as the ratio with France was 5 to 1.75 in capital ships, and 5 to 3 over Japan, the Royal Navy could meet its world-wide commitments, though in cruisers and modern ships it was sadly lacking. The emergence of a strong German navy would





completely upset this calculation, and

the existing margin is only sufficient on the supposition that France will not be our enemy in Europe, and that we are not without allies.

Much of the strategic problem could be eradicated if friendly relations could be re-established with Japan. The D.R.C. wanted this to be done, but British defence preparations had to fulfill the following conditions:

That the Fleet shall be in a position in an emergency to move at short notice as rapidly as possible to the Far East and shall find at intermediate British ports all the fuel and resources it requires to facilitate a rapid passage.

That after its arrival, in the Far East, the Fleet shall find intact the means requisite in maintaining its fighting efficiency and mobility.

The D.R.C. was right. These conditions were central to the whole of British naval policy. But in the period before 1941, as during the 1931-32 crisis, these conditions simply could not be met.

Thus it was not surprising that the D.R.C. summarized three risks of war: in the Far East, where "we envisage an ultimate policy of accommodation with Japan and an immediate and provisional policy of showing a tooth"; with Germany, the ultimate potential enemy against whom Britain's long-range defence policy had to be directed; and in India, the largest Imperial defensive commitment.

The naval programme which the D.R.C. recommended<sup>36</sup> would cost £67 million in construction over five years, and it included provision for bases and fueling stations. In addition, most of the older capital ships would have to be modernized. In the Far East "if our proposals are not carried out, we shall



remain so weak as to invite attack". If they were carried out, Britain's position within five years would become reasonably secure.<sup>37</sup> The high cost was due mainly to the accumulation of deficiencies during the regime of the Ten Year Rule, which had outlived its validity before it was withdrawn. The D.R.C. stressed that no small programme would be consistent with its terms of reference, and believed that the Cabinet wished to know the actual facts of the situation.

The D.R.C.'s report was discussed by the Cabinet on March 14, 1934,<sup>38</sup> The Cabinet approved the priorities the report accorded to the fighting services. But the Cabinet did not approve of the expenditure.<sup>39</sup> It did give its backing, with reservations, to the attempt to re-establish "friendly relations with Japan".

The Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, was much in favour of an understanding with Japan, perhaps even of a non-aggression pact. Simon suggested that if Japan dropped her demands for naval parity with Britain, the signing of such an agreement would be worthwhile.<sup>40</sup> Unstated by Simon or Chamberlain was the chance of such a policy leading to a hardening of relations with America, to increased distrust by the Russians and the tossing of China to the Japanese crocodile.

Ten days later, the First Lord, Viscount Monsell, submitted the naval staff views concerning the limitation of naval armaments<sup>41</sup> to the Ministerial Committee set up to consider naval disarmament.\*

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\* This Committee known as Ministerial Committee Naval Conference was set up on April 16, 1934, and consisted of the P.M. (Chairman), Lord President of the Council, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the three Service Ministers, their advisors, the Secretary of State Dominions, Sir Robert Craigie (Chancellor of the Foreign Office), Vansittart, Fisher, with Hankey as Secretary. Its papers were NC(M) 35.





The staff view was that:

We should be able to send to the Far East a fleet sufficient to provide 'cover' against the Japanese Fleet; we should have sufficient additional forces behind this shield for the protection of our territories and mercantile marine against Japanese attack; at the same time, we should be able to retain in European waters a force sufficient to act as a deterrent to prevent the strongest European naval power from obtaining control of our vital home terminal areas while we can make the necessary redistribution.

To achieve this strategic objective, the staff wished a Washington ratio of 15-9-5 in capital ships for "ourselves, Japan and the strongest European navy".

They pointed out that the old one-power standard was no longer applicable, and defence of home waters was not so easily guaranteed if Britain was engaged in a war with Japan.\* One option was to obtain a naval combination with another power to give Britain security at sea against such aggression. But it was felt that the Government could not "in the absence of our main fleet, confide the entire protection of this country's vital sea communications to a foreign navy".

In balance, the staff noted, British forces were not strong enough to meet all potential dangers. The Royal Navy

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\* In accompanying Tables, the naval staff outlined a capital ship replacement programme that would have replaced the existing capital ships by 1943-1944. The important fact demonstrated by the Table was that by 1941, not one capital ship of the Royal Navy would be less than 25 years old, with the exception of Hood, Rodney and Renown.



would only be able to maintain itself in home waters by withdrawing forces from the Far East to redispense them to meet the German threat. In that event, the staff pointed out, it could not be supposed that Britain should be able to provide protection of its territories and mercantile marine against Japanese attack. If the Cabinet did not accept the proposed two-power standard, the Admiralty could not fight Japan and the strongest European naval power.

Fisher immediately questioned the whole Far Eastern naval policy that was inherent in this naval staff submission. In a memorandum of April 19, 1934, he repeated his usual objections to the Navy building programme.<sup>42</sup> Chamberlain supported Fisher, stressing that Imperial defence rested on the people's willingness to pay for it (which they would not do).

As long as Singapore was completed and the United States remained hostile to Japanese actions, Chamberlain did not think it likely that Japan would menace British interests. The Royal Navy should therefore be built up purely on the basis of a European war and not in accordance with American naval strength or to fight Japan.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps Chamberlain did not see the inconsistency in his assessment that the United States would curtail Japan's ambitions when he and Fisher argued that positive rapport between Britain and the United States would jeopardize friendly relations with Japan. The consequence of the latter policy would be the addition of another unfriendly power.<sup>44</sup>

But Chamberlain's recognition of the German threat was sound. What Chamberlain did not tell the Cabinet was that Italy had been excluded from the D.R.C.'s calculations on his own suggestion, and that the Cabinet, having passed the Ten





Year Rule, and without informing Parliament or the public of its existence, and now having ended it, still resolutely refused to inform the British people of the real dangers at large and the need to rearm. As the service ministers noted,<sup>45</sup> "the public is not aware just how weak we are", and the British people must be told of the necessity of rearmament.<sup>46</sup> The Cabinet ignored the suggestion.

The D.R.C. report was examined by the Ministerial Committee during the months of March, April and May 1934; and on June 6, the latter submitted its own report,<sup>47</sup> which repeated most if not all of the D.R.C. arguments.

The Committee recommended that,<sup>48</sup> depending on financial limitations, H.M.G. should aim at remedying the worst naval deficiencies, complete the Singapore base, the defences at Hong Kong and provide properly defended fueling stations along the route to Singapore. Unless Britain was strong, the Committee noted, she could not gain her foreign policy objectives of securing world peace, including good relations with Japan. The report agreed that the order of danger was the Far East, Europe and India; while Italy, France and the U.S.A. could be eliminated from defence calculations.

While all these discussions went on and the committees met and the memoranda moved their way about Whitehall, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was tenaciously working on the D.R.C.'s report. "I suggested", Chamberlain noted in his diary on March 14, "that I should myself undertake the revision (of the defence requirements) in the light of politics and finance."<sup>49</sup> In his comments on the D.R.C.<sup>50</sup> report, Chamberlain was ruthless. He pointed out that the cost of the naval rearmament programme it advocated over five years inclusive of





shipbuilding would be £97.3 million. "It will probably be admitted", Chamberlain wrote, "that the figures show a position of some gravity both in their financial and their political aspects." He thought that the D.R.C.'s demands were "hardly likely to command immediate popular support ... I need hardly say that proposals that too deeply shock public opinion might lead to a revulsion of feeling ... and loss of the whole programme. We are presented with proposals impossible to carry out." He thought the choice was obvious. "If we have to make a choice, we must prepare our defence against Germany rather than Japan."

As for the Navy, apart from defending British overseas interests and trade routes, naval requirements were chiefly concerned with Japan, since Germany did not possess a fleet. Chamberlain recognized that the D.R.C. proposals (the two-power standard fleet) were based on a war with Japan, and included provision for bases and the completion of Singapore. "I wish to submit", Chamberlain wrote, "very earnestly, that the Ministerial Committee must face the facts courageously and realize the impossibility of simultaneous war with Germany and with Japan." There was no doubt as to priorities. Chamberlain agreed to complete Singapore, "if only out of good faith to the Dominions, but we must postpone the idea of sending out to it a fleet of capital ships capable of containing the Japanese Fleet or meeting it in battle".

Chamberlain's note emphasized two points: that defence policy was being conditioned not by the realities of what the threat was, but by what he and the Treasury felt the taxpayers would be willing to pay. The political dangers to the government weighed more heavily than the external danger to the



nation. It was to be a policy that was applied with great vigor up to 1938, when there was no doubt left about German intentions or Japanese aggression.<sup>51</sup>

No one can dispute that Germany was the major threat. What can be disputed was that Chamberlain's ideas meant that Britain was not ready to face one enemy, let alone two; and by being weak in the centre, she was unable in any circumstances to do anything at all at the periphery. If Singapore went, as the C.I.D. and the C.O.S. had made clear, the whole Far Eastern Empire went with it. The whole content of Chamberlain's note implied that Imperial obligations could be sacrificed if necessary.

Hankey strongly contested Chamberlain's ideas.<sup>52</sup> He pointed out that at a meeting of the C.I.D. on May 31, 1934, the representatives from Australia had been told that there would be consultation with the Dominions before any major decisions were made. Thus, Hankey stated, before any announcement concerning defence policy was made in the House of Commons, the Dominions must be consulted.

One suspects that Hankey saw the Pacific Dominions as a trump card in the game of priorities between Europe and the Far East on one hand; and the Air Force and the Navy on the other.<sup>53</sup> It was a card both he and Chatfield were to play for all it was worth.

In early July 1934, Fisher continued his campaign against the building up of the Navy, sending a personal letter to Chatfield.<sup>54</sup> He questioned the naval policy outlined by the D.R.C., and once more attacked any pandering to the Americans to the detriment of good relations with the Japanese. Replying





with suppressed anger,<sup>55</sup> Chatfield denied that there was any understanding between Britain and the United States. While he agreed that Britain must not anger the Japanese, "I equally hold that we must not antagonize the United States, because one can be a far greater menace to us than the other". And in reply to Fisher's (and Chamberlain's) constantly repeated warnings that Britain could not fight a two-ocean war, Chatfield stated that a simultaneous war with Germany and Japan might not mean the end of Britain, but could lead to the abandonment of Britain's Eastern Empire to Japan.<sup>56</sup>

As for the total policy outlined in the D.R.C. report, Chatfield made clear the basis of the naval policy. He did not think the German threat was as great as the Foreign Office thought. But "we have always had, and we cannot get away from, our Imperial responsibility, and it is our IMPERIAL POSITION WHICH GIVES THIS COUNTRY ITS GREAT VOICE IN THE WORLD".\*

Chatfield's arguments were as clear an exposition of Imperialism as can be found after the close of the Victorian era. His was in fact the voice of the so-called blue-water school of strategic thinking: the Navy was the instrument of Imperial defence, and strategic policy should be founded on Empire defence rather than confined to intervention in Europe. He ignored the reality that Britain had political influence only in Europe when she had the means to intervene on the continent with troops.<sup>57</sup>

Even while the memos and letters went back and forth, while Ministerial Committees debated, rearmament still was not

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\* Italics - mine.



taking place and policy questions had yet to be resolved. Was it to be "Imperial Defence" or defence of Britain against Germany only? Was it to be a "Blue Water Strategy" or was the R.A.F. to assume the role of final protector of the Empire? Was it to be a "continental commitment", or was the Far East to be the major preoccupation?

Certainly there was little increase in the naval estimates presented in 1934. Vote 8 (shipbuilding, repairs and maintenance) was up slightly by about £2.5 million from 1933, while the whole effective vote exceeded that of the year previously by £2.7 million. As for new ships, three of the new City or Southampton class\* and one of the Arethusa class cruisers, plus one aircraft carrier Ark Royal, and five destroyers were laid down.

The Ministerial Committee submitted their final report on the D.R.C. recommendations on July 31, 1934.<sup>58</sup> Signed by Stanley Baldwin in his capacity as Acting Chairman, the Committee agreed that there was no ground for recommending a basic alter-

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\* Southampton class was designed to meet the Japanese Mogami class which mounted fifteen 6" guns. The British 8" cruisers county class, (also known as London class) and Kent class were built to deal with the Japanese 8" cruisers. Designed by Sir William Berry, the Southamptons displaced 9,400 tons, mounted 12 x 6" guns and had a speed of 32 kts. It was folly to have built them, particularly as the Japanese had lied about their Mogamis, which displaced 12,400 tons and mounted 15 x 8" guns. Fortunately they never met in battle. The Arethusa class was 5,200 tons displacement, mounted 6 x 6" guns, and had a speed of 32½ kts. See Brassey's Naval Annual 1939, also British Warships of the Second World War, London 1971.



ation of priorities laid down by the Cabinet last November.<sup>59</sup> Yet the powerful voice of Chamberlain carried the most weight. He emphasized

that any programme now adopted can be adopted only in principle as a general guide. The sums to be allocated to the respective departments in any year will heretofore have to be decided each year ... in the light of financial, political and economic circumstances at home and abroad.<sup>60</sup>

The sums suggested by Chamberlain did not permit the naval programme to be carried out in full as recommended by the D.R.C., and, as he put it: "we have to devise the best programme for national and Imperial defence within the prescribed limits.

While the Committee accepted expenditure on the R.A.F., both the Army and the Navy were slashed.<sup>61</sup> The D.R.C.'s recommendations of £21 million for five years to meet the programmes of Japan and the U.S.A., and to modernize four capital ships by 1938, was to be postponed to 1942. The Committee accepted Chamberlain's revised naval estimates of £68.5 million against the D.R.C.'s figures "for remedying the worst deficiencies of £88 million", for, as Chamberlain noted in his diary on June 6, if air defence was required against Germany, "we certainly can't afford at the same time to rebuild our battle fleet".<sup>62</sup>

The Committee agreed that the most striking feature of the report of the D.R.C. was the extent to which Imperial security depended on the avoidance of hostilities with Japan, and insisted that any war on two widely-separated fronts would strain British resources to the utmost.

The cuts and slashes in the D.R.C.'s recommendations that





Chamberlain advocated were contested by Hankey. Soon after the Ministerial Committee report, he sent a note to the Prime Minister<sup>63</sup> protesting the cuts: "the Chancellor of the Exchequer had put forth theoretical doctrines about the future of the fleet as affecting the Far East". Not to complete Singapore, and not to base a fleet there, would have serious repercussions in Australia and New Zealand, whose defence "is, as you know, built up on the assumption of a base at Singapore with a fleet of capital ships based on it". How could Britain betray this promise, Hankey asked, while applauding Australia's decision to spend £6 million on her navy which would be part of the Royal Navy in time of war?

As the year 1934 closed, the Cabinet had still not taken any decisive steps toward rearmament.<sup>64</sup> Until it did, naval policy was in abeyance, for the Admiralty still did not have the fleet that was of a size for it to carry out all its responsibilities. The C.O.S. and C.I.D. were agreed on one issue: that the Far East needed defending, and that only the Navy could do it. This had been the historical assumption, and the Admiralty still felt it held good. The D.R.C. had asked for what, in effect, was a "two-power standard" in the sense that it allowed for a fleet to move east, leaving sufficient forces to protect Britain's vital terminal points. Unfortunately, as Fisher kept hammering home, and as Chatfield admitted in part, Britain could no longer assume the burden of defending the Empire - it had become too expensive. Yet even while Fisher and Vansittart were demanding that Britain forego any pretence of sending a fleet to the Far East, and while the Cabinet was reluctant to agree to anything but a modest increase



in the naval estimates, there was still no honourable way Britain could shirk her Imperial obligations. That in itself made it imperative that Britain should work out a Far Eastern naval strategy. The question which would emerge was, what kind of strategy and what kind of fleet?

Finally, one can discern a subtle change in the basis of Far Eastern naval strategy. No longer was the emphasis on sending a fleet to the Far East which would be able to meet and defeat the Japanese Navy. Now the words used were, to send a fleet to protect British communications and to provide "cover" against the Japanese Fleet. It was the beginning of the end of the former strategy.

During the period from the Sino-Japanese crisis of September 1931 to the end of 1934, the British were slowly coming to accept that world conditions had changed for the worse, and that some measures had to be taken to rearm. There was certainly no excuse for the British not to do so. The Foreign Office had emphasized the deteriorating world situation, and the D.R.C. had reiterated the dangers that were emerging. Yet the Cabinet, in which one of the strongest personalities was Chamberlain, acquiesced to his estimates of the British capability to rearm, and consequently moved at a snail's pace to refurbish Britain's fighting forces. Part of the reason can be laid at the door of the services themselves, and the constant arguments over what the defence priorities were. The services were just beginning to work together to present a united front to the government in order to get increased funds for rearmament. With the question of priorities laid, the definition of the Navy's role would determine what the Government would give for expansion of the Fleet. This in turn





completed the circle, for an expanded two-power standard fleet, as advocated by the D.R.C., would only be a vital necessity if the Japanese threat was perceived as the greatest the British had to prepare for. If this was held to be the case, a large fleet would be a necessity, and British naval strategy in the Far East would be viable. The same condition applied to the completion of the Singapore base. The urgency of this would again be contingent on the acceptance of Japan as the major menace.

For the moment, Japan was accepted as the greater immediate threat, while Germany was viewed as the long-range menace. Yet while the possibility of an alliance between Germany and Japan was recognized, as witness Chamberlain's remarks to the C.I.D. in November 1933, even this possibility, which would have placed Britain in a desperate position, did not spur the Government to expand the Royal Navy or to modernize its ships. The Cabinet and others still hoped that diplomacy would alleviate some of the dangers - witness the continual references to re-establishment of friendly relations with Japan, and the exclusion of Italy from defence calculations. Yet, as the C.O.S. noted, the D.R.C. pointed out, and the Admiralty made clear, unless the Fleet was ready for war, British diplomacy lacked teeth.

From the moment that Hitler came to power in Germany, the basic British naval strategy in the Far East started to erode. The condition that prevailed prior to World War I reappeared: danger in Europe, and Britain without allies. The differences were, that Japan was not a possible ally, the Royal Navy was well below its 1914 strength, and Britain's former European ally, France, although in possession of a



reasonable fleet, was not in formal alliance with Britain. This, however, did not stop the C.O.S. from referring to the possibility of joint action with the French Fleet, which would allow the British to maintain her Far Eastern strategy. The C.O.S. however realized it would make Britain dependent on a foreign power for its naval security, if a British fleet was sent east. This tactful reminder was intended to bring the Cabinet to realize the extent of the Royal Navy's weakness, and its implications. The unavoidable commitment to defend the Empire - a commitment which Chatfield and Hankey harped upon when pressing the Navy's case for a larger fleet - suggested that British policy was still governed by the pursuit of peace, but with some acknowledgment that it could better be gained by a Britain armed than a Britain devoid of weapons. As Chatfield later wrote, Britain had disarmed herself "and if risks have been run, they have been accepted deliberately in pursuit of the aim of permanent peace. Governments have postponed the adoption of measures that were required when considered from the point of view of national defence alone."<sup>65</sup> Yet the Statement of Defence published on March 4, 1935,<sup>66</sup> (which expressed the Government's concerns over the European situation, and suggested a move towards real rearmament) only increased the estimates for the fighting services by £4 million - somewhat less impressive than the professed government concern. There was still no definitive objective in terms of Grand Strategy. The enemy against whom Britain was to arm, which service was to receive priority and why, were as yet unclear. Chatfield had no doubts. His aim was always clear and consistent: the Far East came first.<sup>67</sup>

Yet events were about to change the whole basis of Imperial





Defence, and the defence of the Far East in particular.<sup>68</sup> Italy was to become a potential enemy, and Japan was to go on the march again. But in mid-1935, the C.O.S., preparing yet again their Annual Review of Imperial Defence, still adhered to the original strategic priorities.

In the Annual Review of Imperial Defence for 1935, the C.O.S. views were again made explicit and the whole document repeated what had been said in 1934, with embellishments.<sup>69</sup> They again pointed out

that we should be called upon to fight Germany and Japan simultaneously without allies is a state of affairs to the prevention of which our diplomacy would naturally be directed. With France as our ally, the naval situation in Europe would wear a different complexion, and the main British Fleet would be available to defend our Empire in the East.

The C.O.S. repeated their earlier warning that 1936 would be the crucial year, for by then Japan would have completed the modernization of her capital ships, and expanded her air force. With British defence at a low ebb in the Far East, "every effort should be made to avoid incidents which might lead Japan to take precipitate action".

The C.O.S. were still uncertain of the Government's policy in respect to the three services. Were they to plan for a war with Germany alone? Were the priorities still the same?

The highlight of the C.O.S. report was the stress on France as a vital naval ally. Only with the French and British Fleets working in tandem could the Admiralty dispatch a fleet to Singapore.

What could the British give the French in return? If





Britain and France faced the Germans, would the French be amenable to watching the main portion of the British Fleet sail to the Far East? These questions did not demand an immediate answer, but at some stage, the Admiralty's Far Eastern strategy was going to be on a collision course with the demands of a European commitment.

The Cabinet attempts to seek naval limitations, and to seize any possible chance of reducing any naval power which might be ranged against the Royal Navy, led to the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement on June 18, 1935.<sup>70</sup> The terms of the Treaty limited the German surface fleet to 35% in all categories of ships in relation to the aggregate strength of the naval forces of the British Empire.

Submarines were exempted. In this category, Germany could build to 100% of British strength, but was obligated by a "gentleman's agreement" in the Treaty to limit her undersea strength to 45%.<sup>71</sup>

The Treaty, while limiting German naval strength (even while the Germans built tougher, larger, bigger-gunned ships than they were allowed) had significant implications for the execution of British naval strategy. It meant that the French Fleet became a more vital component in British plans: a German Navy at 35% strength of the Royal Navy, allied with a Japanese Navy with a strength of 30% of British capital ship tonnage, eliminated any possibility of a British fleet moving east under the existing one-power standard. But the Treaty at least allowed the British to think that it kept German naval strength within manageable proportions, and thus would allow an expanded Royal Navy to meet its two ocean commitments. A Germany rushing headlong into warship construction would have ended all plans to send a fleet east.<sup>72</sup>



Chatfield wrote long after the event that "it was clear to the First Lord and myself that the wise course was to come to an agreement on the matter ... and so try to stabilize naval construction in Europe and call a halt to secret construction and suspicion".<sup>73</sup>

To stabilize naval construction in Europe was excellent policy; but the result, as Churchill noted later in his history of the Second World War, was that the worst part of the Treaty was "the effect upon our position at the other end of the world ... in the Far East. What a windfall this has been to Japan: when this programme (of Germany's) is completed, the British Fleet will be largely anchored to the North Sea. That means to say that the whole position in the Far East has been gravely altered to the detriment of the United States and of Great Britain."<sup>74</sup>

The Naval Treaty, which appeared so harmless at the time, laid the "foundations of one of the most serious threats in history against Great Britain". It was "the first act of appeasement".<sup>75</sup>

In early July 1935, the Defence Policy Requirements Committee met to discuss the rearmament programme in the light of the changing international situation.<sup>76</sup> They noted that Britain would not be ready for war before 1939. In the Far East moreover, she was the only power with vast interests but no allies.

That from a military point of view, apart from the permanent interests of this country in the maintenance of peace, it is of the utmost importance that this country should not become involved in war in the next few years. We cannot urge too strongly that no opportunity should be lost to avoid the risk of war either in the Far East or Europe for as long as possible. This is essential not only from the point of view of the general





interests of the Empire, but in order to gain time for making good the heavy deficiencies in our defence services as a whole.

In the Far East, "Appeasement of relations with Japan is of no less importance at the present time. There could be no greater contribution towards Imperial defence than an advance in both directions, providing that it does not result in further unilateral disarmament on our part."

Time was what was needed, but time appeared to be running out. In February 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia. On July 5, when all attempts at a compromise solution for ending the war had failed, it was up to the League of Nations. Either its members imposed sanctions against Italy, with the burden of enforcement falling upon Britain, the only League member with a powerful navy; or else, as an agency to stop aggression, the League was finished.

The story of the War has been told many times elsewhere, but the crisis had an important impact on British strategic planning.

In August 1935, the D.R.C. issued another report. It was not a document to give encouragement to the Treasury or to Chamberlain.<sup>77</sup> After noting the serious naval situation caused by the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, the report pointed out that while Germany would be ready for war by 1939, Britain could not meet the challenge within the three budget years remaining "under the present limits of expenditure". The report went on to state: "We do not believe it is possible to achieve a state of preparedness regardless of the year aimed for, either 1939 or 1942, which would constitute an effective deterrent or defence within the limits of increases of expenditure in ... the estimates of the defence services.



The Committee could see "no prospect of submitting acceptable or realistic programmes on that basis".

In blunt terms of warning, the Committee made it clear that "if this country is to equip herself adequately for its own security ... we can see no alternative but for the Government to widen its horizons, and to resort to some system of capital expenditure for this purpose".

Soon after the D.R.C. submitted this report, the Mediterranean crisis started to occupy the attention of the Cabinet and the services. The C.O.S.,<sup>78</sup> both in a report and at their meeting of August 8, 1935, strongly advised against any enforcement of Article 16 of the League Covenant, (Sanctions Clause). The harsh fact was that the services were far from ready for a conflict.\* They drew attention to the strategic consequences of a war against Italy, if the Fleet was involved in active operations in spite of the co-operation of the French and other navies. They added that losses to the Fleet had to be expected:

"The British Fleet already weak, will be still further reduced. There is bound to be a danger therefore that the results of war with Italy will be to cause the British Fleet to be weakened to such an extent as to be unable to fulfil its world-wide responsibilities."

Two months later, on October 4, Chatfield told the D.R.C.<sup>79</sup> that the naval estimates up to the present had reflected the old policy, which was based largely on the possibility of a war with Japan. This had now gone overboard. "It now appears", said Chatfield, "that if we were to send a fleet to the Far

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\* The Report was signed by Hankey, Vansittart, Chatfield Montgomery - Massingberd, Ellington and Fisher. Capt. Mackenzie Grieve R.N. Ret., informed the author that the Fleet had 15 minutes ammunition.





East\*, we should in future have to maintain another fleet in the Mediterranean to guard its communications". This strategic problem of a "hostile Italy on our line of communication was a policy never before allowed to happen". One thing was obvious: none of the C.O.S., nor Hankey, had much love for the League of Nations, for as Hankey put it, "we were now at loggerheads with Italy", with the possibility of war against both her and Japan, when Britain "had no quarrel with either". "If only we had the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", said Hankey, "it would relieve Britain of her anxieties East of Suez."

With the Navy stretched to the full, its men tired due to lack of home leave and sufficient replacement crews, and its foreign stations stripped of ships,<sup>80</sup> it was little wonder that Chatfield kept demanding the avoidance of war with Italy. It was now glaringly obvious that the Fleet was not capable of a major war. Six days later, the D.R.C. again discussed the strategic situation.<sup>81</sup> Hankey commented that in the event of a Far Eastern war with Italy hostile, it would "be better ... frankly, to abandon the Central and Eastern Mediterranean 'for a time'". It was not to be the last time that this policy was advocated.

Vansittart asked Chatfield whether without France, Britain could fight Japan, while Italy was hostile. Chatfield replied: "This was the basis of our one-power standard. We relied on French support against Germany, and we now proposed to rely on

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\* It should be noted that Australia and New Zealand sent their two cruisers to the Mediterranean: H.M.A.S. Sydney and H.M.N.Z.S. Achilles.





similar support against Italy. It all came back to the position in which we were now; we relied on other countries for our security."

When the conversation returned to Hankey's almost heretical suggestion of abandoning the Middle East, including Egypt, (which amazed Vansittart), the C.I.G.S. asked if Hankey was serious. The latter replied (true to his posture as an imperialist) that the position in the Far East was still more serious than that in the Mediterranean. "If we collapsed there (in the Far East) it would be the start of the break-up of the British Empire." As Hankey saw it, it would be impossible to abandon India, Australia and New Zealand to Japan. Thus, in the event of trouble in the Far East, a fleet would have to be sent out. He would have liked to believe that the Navy was strong enough to maintain its position at Singapore in addition to holding back the Germans and keeping the Italians neutral.<sup>82</sup> So would everyone else.

Hankey, armed with his prestige and influence as Chairman, battled against every attempt to downgrade the priority accorded to the Far East. When the Admiralty presented a memorandum which said that in the event of a war in Europe and the Far East, the Fleet would have to be withdrawn from the latter theatre of operations, Hankey immediately questioned this assumption.<sup>83</sup> He wondered if the D.R.C. "should be content with such a situation". Should they not say "boldly" that Britain needed a navy which could defend her position against Japan and Germany? And all this talk of Italy: "leave out Italy ... Italy is exhausted". Hankey told the Committee

to suggest that they open their mouths much wider when putting proposals to the Government. No risks could be taken in the Far East ... Japan could overrun



the East and we should be in an impossible position with Australia and New Zealand at the mercy of Japan and India cut off. The whole security of the Empire and maintenance of our prestige in the world is dependent on a defence which could leave us in a strong defensive position in the East in the event of trouble in the West. He felt it was well worth paying extra insurance to create a greater deterrent to Japan.

Hankey's proposals were quite acceptable to Chatfield, who outlined what the Admiralty meant by a two-power standard: the battle fleet had to be increased from 15 to 20 capital ships, which would enable the Admiralty to send 11 to the Far East (a margin of two over Japan) and keep 9 at home against German's 7. The Admiralty also wanted 100 cruisers as opposed to the former minimum of 70.

It was a large order, and the D.R.C. asked the Admiralty to prepare detailed estimates of what this new standard of naval strength would cost. They also concluded with a plea to the Cabinet to keep in mind that if

England and the Empire have still a contribution to make to civilization, and their survival therefore is still worthwhile, we feel additional insurance against accumulating dangers is the alternative to the epitaph 'England has made a shameful conquest of itself'.

But the D.R.C. did not come to grips with the reality that the 'shameful defeat' might be prevented not only by increasing defence preparations, but by a firm alliance with France. Chatfield had raised the key issue: if Britain needed the French Fleet to off-set Germany and Italy so as to permit the dispatch of the major part of the Royal Navy to the Far East to protect what were mainly British interests, what would Britain give of equal value to France in return? Under





the concept of "limited liability",<sup>84</sup> which meant that Britain would not put large land forces on the battlefield at the side of the French Army, there was little that Britain could offer. The D.R.C. and the C.O.S. never tackled this until the eve of war. Did the D.R.C. and the C.O.S. want it both ways: France as an ally to help protect British Far Eastern interests indirectly by covering home waters, while Britain avoided any commitment to the land battle in Europe? If so, that was self-interest to the level of 'perfidious Albion'.

The D.R.C. left the Cabinet, by November 1935, in no doubt as to the gravity of the strategic position.<sup>85</sup> The naval situation bordered on the desperate. The German building programme, to be completed in 1942, would give Germany 5 capital ships including three Deutschlands, while Japan would also have two new capital ships in 1939. If there was a serious emergency in the Far East, the Royal Navy would have no margin of security in the event of a threatening situation in the West. Japan was likely to move once Britain was involved in Europe, and unless Britain had sufficient power in the Far East to meet that challenge, "New Zealand, Australia, Burma, India and a vast trade is at Japan's mercy and the Eastern half of the British Empire might well be doomed". A new naval standard was required, one which would allow Britain to send a fleet to the Far East; and at the same time, be able to maintain a force able to meet the requirements of a war with Germany.

"Great navies can not be built in a night", the Cabinet was told, "and we are on our way to losing our sea security". On the other hand:

'We still have something to rely on: our naval experience, and the fact that we have turned our



national energy and skills into naval channels ... also in our shipbuilding capacity our great dock yards, bases, naval instinct of the nation enables a fleet to be manned with superior seamen. If we wholeheartedly accept whatever sacrifices that are necessary, we can retrieve the situation.

Whatever the D.R.C. might think about British naval shipbuilding capability, the truth was that the long period of the Ten Year Rule and the subsequent economies imposed by the Government during the financial crisis, had so diminished the capability that it was almost impossible to build up the fleet in time, unless the Government was prepared to take drastic measures of mobilizing industry. This the Government was not prepared to do.<sup>86</sup>

The other aspect of the naval problem was the interdependence of an alliance with France and the defence of the Far East. There was little doubt that Britain needed the French Fleet. The British however were unwilling to accept the implications of what this meant - a field force ready to march into France to fight a land war.<sup>87</sup> The C.O.S., as Michael Howard notes, tried to convince the Cabinet that a continental commitment would be a disaster, if for no other reason than that Britain was unready for any war.<sup>88</sup>

The C.O.S. and D.R.C.'s continual harping that good relations should be established with Japan carried with it the grim possibility of antagonizing the United States, the one power which had the resources to tip the balance well in favour of the West, and the only power with Far Eastern interests and policies that set her against Japan. The extent to which this anti-American policy reflected the views of the members of the D.R.C. is hard to assess. Fisher and Montgomery-





Massingberd were almost violently anti-American; Hankey's posture was governed by his Imperialistic sentiments, and he was certainly not pro-American; and Chamberlain certainly was not an Americanophile. Yet there was continued reference to the possibility of American intervention against Japan if American interests were threatened.<sup>89</sup> But most planners, at whatever rank, were not convinced that America could be relied upon.

While the Abyssinian war was in progress, and the German menace was becoming more plain, the British electorate was getting a chance to express its views on the Government's performance. The General Election of 1935 was one of passion and fury. While no single issue had ever decided a general election, the Opposition parties made rearmament their key platform. They were against it.<sup>90</sup>

Baldwin\* skilfully maintained the balance between the Government's record as a whole and the need to rearm to preserve the safety of the Kingdom.<sup>91</sup>

The National Government was returned with a handsome majority, and true to its word, it did not embark on any huge armaments' programme.

As Chatfield wrote to Hankey: "He (Lord Weir, Chairman of the Board of Industrial Advisers for Defence) told me recently that he hoped that nothing would be done to upset civil industry in carrying out the service requirements, and I feel that he will not help us greatly."<sup>92</sup>

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\* Baldwin had replaced MacDonald as Prime Minister in July 1935.





Lord Weir himself had some doubts about priorities and roles, and in a memorandum concerning the D.R.C. proposals of November 1935,<sup>93</sup> he pointed out:

I feel that in the case of the Army and Navy there exists a definite basis of strategic policy (which may or may not be the best) ... Putting it bluntly, in each of their cases, strengths are associated with definite jobs of work ... to be carried out. When I turn to the new war arm, the air, nowhere can I find any strategic foundation for the standard of security ... other than first line parity with Germany.

Weir felt that parity was wrong: it should be domination, and the R.A.F. should be built up as the Royal Navy had been in the past, superior to any enemy's force. As far as Weir was concerned, the Navy was not going to worry Germany. Only an air striking force would deter the Nazis. Public opinion was against a British Army being sent to France, and geography, economics and finances dictated that the R.A.F. could provide defence on the cheap. Weir wanted the C.O.S. to have another look at the strategic assumptions of a major war and to see if possibly the R.A.F. could assume a greater role in terms of local and overseas defence - defence in reality being an offensive striking force of bombers.

Ticking away in Weir's memorandum was the explosive idea that air power would replace the Navy as the major arm of British military power. Blockade by sea, once the cheapest and most effective way of striking at Britain's enemies by bringing pressure on their economic capability and the morale of their populations, had lost most of its efficacy. Any power in Europe which could achieve by arms, or industrial power, mastery over the continent, had little to fear from blockade. Air power seemed to offer the answer.

Weir's memorandum should have opened the minds of the



Navy to think through their basic policy, for it also raised questions of where the Navy was going to fight. If it was in the Far East, then the two-power standard held; if it was not, then the Navy should have devoted its energies to protection of the Atlantic life-line.

Within the Defence Policy and Requirements Committee, the arguments over priorities continued unabated. The construction programme recommended by the D.R.C. of the two-power standard, was, as Chatfield put it, a return to the old standard of being able to send a fleet to the Far East to act on the defensive, while securing home waters. The problem was that the R.N., while moderately well represented in heavy ships (which were however, quite old), was deficient in cruisers and light vessels. The Navy wanted more cruisers but not more submarines, for as the First Lord, Monsell, stated, the Admiralty felt that they "had not today the same importance that they had in the past". Chatfield felt that submarines would not act "as a deterrent to Japan".<sup>94</sup>

The Mediterranean crisis still weighed heavily on Chatfield. He wished to redeploy the Fleet. The dispute with Italy was a side show to the more important issue of "maintaining the Fleet in an efficient condition for service in the Far East", and while the crisis had not reduced this efficiency, the strain was telling on the crews and ships.<sup>95</sup>

In February 1936, the Defence Policy and Requirements (D.P.R.) Committee (which was the old D.R.C. strengthened by the addition of Cabinet Ministers) met to look at the Defence Programme of the Services.<sup>96</sup> They repeated that "defence requirements are so serious that it would not be possible within the three year period with which this report mainly deals,





to make provision "for war against Italy as well as Germany and Japan".

On March 3, 1936, the White Paper on Defence was presented to Parliament.<sup>97</sup> The sad deficiencies of the Navy that had been exposed during the Mediterranean crisis were acknowledged. It was "now necessary not only to proceed with new construction at a more rapid rate than in recent years, but also to make good existing deficiencies in ammunition and stores of all kinds". Two new capital ships were to be laid down in 1937, and five cruisers would be included in the '36 programme. A new aircraft carrier was to be "laid down shortly" and the Fleet Air Arm was to be expanded to bring it "more nearly to the level of Japan and the United States".

The role of the Navy, as outlined by the White Paper, was to protect "our sea communications" so that supplies, raw materials and food could arrive unhindered on passage.\* In addition, there was the vital job of "maintaining free passage between different parts of the Empire of troops and supplies of all kinds, thus assuring the very foundation of our system of Imperial defence".

The net estimates for the Navy were £69.9 million, £9.9 million over 1935.

Four days after the White Paper was made public, Hitler denounced the Locarno Pacts and moved his troops into the Rhineland. In early May 1936, the Italians entered Addis Ababa.

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\* It was also stated policy that the P.M. was appointing a deputy to act in his stead on the C.I.D. and the D.P.R. who would be charged with the day to day supervision and control of these two Committees. He would hold ministerial rank, and his title would be Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence.



To all intents the Abyssinian war was over. The Admiralty and the C.O.S. now increased their pressure on the Cabinet to stand down the Fleet<sup>98</sup> and to redistribute the ships, "which will permit us to be more ready to defend our interests at home or in the Far East".<sup>99</sup>

The Admiralty and the C.O.S. had repeatedly stated that 1936 was the critical year in respect to Japan's naval capability for war. A hostile Italy would not only disrupt communications through the Mediterranean, but would completely upset the naval balance in favour of Japan. The margin of naval strength was so slight that any extra naval commitment would be a disaster. In the councils of Government, the Admiralty's powerful voice cautioned against arousing Italy, and it was a voice that found receptive ears. Imperial-Far Eastern considerations helped win the day for Italy.

As the D.R.C. had noted, how quickly the Navy could become ready for war was contingent on the shipbuilding capacity of Britain, and the ability of other industry to produce the component parts: fire-control gear, optics, explosives, gun control machines, and electronic equipment. The records of the meetings and the reports of the D.P.R. are a story of one bottleneck after another. Production of gun control gear was "unsatisfactory". There was a shortage of machine tools and jigs, of shell fuses, smokeless cordite, fittings, electrical wire and cable and even of manuals for the equipment produced.

Within the shipbuilding industry, the ravages of the long years of unemployment were appearing.<sup>100</sup> In 1922, there were 358,000 men employed in the shipbuilding industry of the United Kingdom. In 1935, this figure had fallen to 157,000. Of the 201,000 who were off the books, many had left the shipbuilding centres, many others had been out of work so long





they had lost their Union Membership or had lost their skills. Of the total work force, only 10% of the under 25's worked, and only 5% of the over 55's. There was a desperate lack of skilled men coming through the apprentice system due to cut-backs of the lean years. 42.4% of all the skilled men who were part of the shipyard work-force had been out of work for three years or more.<sup>101</sup>

Yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain, would not countenance any "interference" with normal trade.<sup>102</sup> He had made it quite clear that the proposals put forward were for the acceleration of already approved programmes; and at the same time, he did not want it to be thought that the Treasury could meet the whole of the increase in detail.<sup>103</sup>

In a series of further reports and memoranda,<sup>104</sup> both the Joint Planners and the Chiefs of Staff kept reminding the C.I.D. that the Far East remained the most immediate British commitment, and unless the naval construction programme was accelerated and four capital ships were modernized immediately to be made ready by 1940, the Fleet would not be able to protect British interests East of Suez and would be short three capital ships in 1940.<sup>105</sup>

"In such an event, the situation would be as follows", the Joint Planners wrote.<sup>106</sup> "We would send a fleet to the Far East, adequate in heavy ship strength for a defensive strategy while retaining sufficient strength at home to contain the German Forces." The forces required for the Far East and home waters would leave nothing available for the Mediterranean, and Britain would have to rely on the French Fleet to deal with the Italian Fleet and dispute the control of sea communications to North Africa.<sup>107</sup>





Shortly after this memo reached the C.O.S., the Far Eastern situation became more threatening. On November 25, 1936, Japan and Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>108</sup>

Directed for the most part against the U.S.S.R., the Pact was a recognition of Japan's growing isolation in world affairs and her failure to gain agreements with western nations concerning Far Eastern matters. The Pact was to run for five years, and was not in the strict sense a binding commitment by either party. If either of the two nations were attacked by the U.S.S.R., the other would do nothing to relieve the burden on Russia; and both would consult as to what attitude should be taken to protect their common interests. Neither of the parties was to conclude any treaties with the Soviet Union unless by mutual consent.

In many respects, history had come full circle with the agreement between Germany and Japan. Sounding much like the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in terms of vagueness of hard commitments, it accomplished what that Alliance had set out to prevent: an agreement between Germany and Japan which would have made the British naval problem untenable prior to World War I.

But if the immediate portents that surrounded the Pact did not augur well for Britain (who as in the days before the Alliance with Japan had no committed allies), in the long run it proved beneficial, for it angered the United States, and made the Americans aware that both Germany and Japan were a menace to world peace.

On July 7, 1937, the Japanese Army began operations against Nanking. The increasing tempo of the Sino-Japanese conflict led to Japanese provocations of the United States and Britain. These took the form of "incidents": the arrest and maltreatment by Japanese police of two British seamen at Keelung,



Formosa, in October 1936\*; the attack on British gunboats and merchant ships on December 12, 1937, near Wuhu on the Yangtse River; the more serious incident when Japanese aircraft sunk the U.S.S. Panay on the same day: all these were indications of Japan's contempt for the Western Powers and her refusal to take heed of other nations' rights in China.

The growing threat to British interests both east and west of Suez finally induced the Cabinet to allocate more funds to improve the state of Britain's fighting services. On February 26 1937, the Government issued another White Paper on Defence.<sup>109</sup> Prime Minister Chamberlain\*\* said he deeply deplored the necessity for this vast expenditure on armaments and other defensive measures, but "we are convinced that it must be undertaken". The naval estimates for 1937 were £105 million, a jump of £24 million over 1936. The new construction programme included 3 new battleships\*\*\* (the King George V Class), two aircraft carriers, five cruisers (8,000

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\* The incident at Keelung involved the "payment" of a taxi fare by three seamen from the H.M.S. Medway. They had been arrested in the dispute, where at a local police station they were assaulted and one seaman had his jaw broken. An officer who went to the station to gain the men's release was insulted. The British Government demanded an apology, and a goodwill visit of the C-in-C China station Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Little was cancelled. Finally the incident was closed with a letter of apology from the local Japanese administrator in early 1937. See "Naval Events", Brassey's Naval Annual, 1937, p. 9.

\*\* In England, Neville Chamberlain assumed the Office of Prime Minister in May, 1937.

\*\*\* 35,000 tons, 10 x 14" guns, 28½ kts.





tons York Class)\*, two 5,000 ton cruisers (Arethusa Class)\*\*, along with destroyers, submarines and escort vessels.

This did not mean that the Admiralty had got what it wanted. They were continually asking the Government to accelerate the programme by the adoption of emergency measures, a policy which the Cabinet was unwilling to sanction. The following year, 1938, the Cabinet did agree to accelerate the programme so as to complete within three years all that industry could manage. But they were firm in their refusal to resort to "emergency measures" and to divert labour, civilian shipbuilding and related industry to the naval programme.<sup>110</sup>

It was not just Treasury miserliness that was affecting the naval programme. The lack of capacity in the shipbuilding industry was producing almost desperate bottlenecks. As Chamberlain told the C.I.D.: "It was not the anxiety of financial policy which imposed the limits on our rearmament programme, but the limitation of labour on our power to expand."<sup>111</sup>

The Fleet Air Arm lacked training aircraft due to delays in the production of planes for the service. Little energy was expended and except for aircraft, little disturbance of industry had yet occurred.<sup>112</sup>

Meanwhile, the Japanese continued to build, laying down two new carriers, with rumours of 45,000 ton battleships on the stocks in Japan being bruited about. In Europe, Britain and Germany signed what was a reaffirmation of the 1935 agreement. The limitation on 10,000-ton warships with 8" guns was

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\* 8,300 tons, 6 x 8" guns, 32 kts.

\*\* 5,200 tons, 6 x 6" guns, 32 kts.



immediately altered, as the U.S.S.R. informed the British (under a separate naval agreement) of its intention to build seven such ships. The Germans claimed that this allowed them to lay down two new 10,000-ton ships, as they were willing to adhere to the spirit of the agreement and to the London Naval Treaty.

To summarize. The period 1932-1937 was the beginning of a fundamental change in British strategic policy as it related to both Europe and the Far East. As events close to home unfolded, particularly the re-emergence of Germany as the potential enemy, followed by the new aggressiveness of Italy, British planners had to cope with a situation never before envisaged: the possibility of a war with Japan arising simultaneously with a hostile Italy in the Mediterranean and a German enemy on the continent of Europe. Faced with these overwhelming forces potentially arrayed against the Empire, together with their realization of the shortcomings of British capabilities to fight such a combination, British planners started to re-evaluate the former strategic priorities. The key question concerned the priority accorded to the Far East in terms of British commitments. Should that theatre still remain the second priority after the defence of the United Kingdom, or should the Mediterranean area take second place?

If the Far East remained a second priority of strategic importance, the Royal Navy would have to be built up to fight a two-ocean war. In addition, funds would have to be made available to complete the Singapore base at an accelerated pace to be able to accommodate the Fleet.

If on the other hand, the Mediterranean was to get second priority, a different configuration of British defence require-





ments would emerge, particularly as it was assumed that the French Fleet could contain the Italians in the Mediterranean, allowing the Royal Navy at its present strength to cope with the Germans. But overshadowing every discussion, was the relative roles of the R.A.F. and the Royal Navy. As has been noted, there were strong arguments presented by Fisher, Weir and Vansittart that Germany was the major threat: to counter it, a strong R.A.F. was required, not a vast Royal Navy. Their arguments were logical. Britain could not afford to fight a two-ocean war; and since Germany was the greater threat, the Far East had to be downgraded in terms of priorities. This in turn meant that the old assumption of a Royal Navy able to secure home waters and send a fleet to the Far East would have to go.

Still, the commitment to the Far East could not lightly be disregarded. Imperial obligations demanded that the Pacific Dominions be defended, Singapore completed, India protected and sea communications in the Indian Ocean secured. To accomplish that aim, as well as to contain Germany, meant that Britain needed allies, and also needed time to make ready for war. Thus British diplomacy had to detach Italy from Germany, and gain France as an ally, for the French Fleet was becoming a vital element in British strategic calculations concerning the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East.

In respect to Italy, Britain had to offer something in return, and that meant sacrificing some of Britain's interests in the Middle East, and possibly angering France. To gain France, Britain would have to offer at least support against Germany, and that meant land forces, a commitment which no British Government was yet ready to make.





One answer to the problem was the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, which by getting Germany's commitment to limit the strength of her Navy, kept the naval threat from that quarter within manageable boundaries, and would allow Britain to put a fleet of some size in the Far East. As far as Japan was concerned, while there were many who kept advocating a return to friendly relations with that country, British policy was governed to some extent by the American attitude to Japan. Regardless of how much certain British statesmen and military leaders might want a rapprochement with Japan, the necessity of maintaining cordial relations with the United States precluded such an initiative. In addition, there were many within the Foreign Office who continually advised against concession to the Japanese, and the combination of the American factor and Foreign Office advice helped maintain a British policy of stiffness towards the Japanese. In fact this policy was to pay off in the long term. Japanese actions were slowly to drive Britain and the United States together in common cause. Yet if this was not completely clear at the time, there was some cognisance taken of the American factor in British Far Eastern strategic calculations, and as time passed, these calculations were to assume greater and greater importance.

However, in 1937, Britain still was without any allies, nor was she prepared to make a sufficient commitment to France to gain one. And as yet, the question of strategic priorities had still to be finalized. It would be the growing aggressiveness of Germany which would force Britain to resolve both these questions.

Yet, as has been pointed out, Britain could not discount the necessity to defend her interests in the Far East. The



arguments that ensued over this problem were not all conducted within the quiet of Whitehall Offices. The Dominions kept up an incessant demand to be consulted, and to attend meetings concerning Far Eastern policy, and were always ready to pounce upon any hint that Britain was weakening in her resolve to defend the Far East.





FOOTNOTES

1. C.I.D. 1082-B. 23/2/32. Cab. 4/2 and C.I.D. 1083-B, Cab. 4/21.
2. See also P.S.O. (SB) 116 28/5/30. Cab. 60/9 also Cab. 60/12 - 6/17, and 60/34/111.
3. C.I.D. 1087-B 11/3/32 Cab. 4/21.
4. C.I.D. 255th meeting 22/3/32 Cab. 2/5.
5. Cab. 19(32)2 23/3/32 and Hankey to MacDonald 16/1/33, Cab. 63/46.
6. See J.W. Wheeler - Bennett, The Disarmament Deadlock, London, 1934. Also Adm. File 3373-3376; Adm. 52/5713, Vols. 1-4, also C.P. 53(31) and C.I.D. 1064-B, Cab. 4/21.
7. Lord Strang, Britain in World Affairs, London 1961, p. 321.
8. Quoted in F.L.Wood, The New Zealand People at War, Wellington, 1958, pp. 60-61.
9. Hankey to Chamberlain 2/3/33. Cab. 21/425. See also letter to Lord Hailsham from Chairman of Vickers, Sir Noel Black, 8/12/32 in Cab. 21/425.
10. Hankey to P.M. 6/3/33, Cab. 21/371.
11. These were Birmingham Small Arms, not in heavy arms business at the time.  
Coventry Ordinance Works, out of business.  
London Small Arms - not in existence.  
Armstrong-Whitworth - not part of Vickers.  
Cammell Laird - reduced capacity.  
Beardmore - no production facility.  
Firths - just able to cope with small orders.  
Hadfields - same as above.  
Projectile Ltd. - almost out of business.  
Darlington Forge - out of business.  
John Brown - small capacity.



12. C.I.D. 1103-B 31/3/33, Cab. 4/22.
13. C.I.D. 258th meeting 6/4/33, Cab. 2/5.
14. Cab. 27(33)5, 12/4/33.
15. The Oil Board estimated that the Admiralty was short 83 tankers to maintain the Fleet in the Far East. The demand for tankers in the Far Eastern war was believed to be Navy - 237, Army and R.A.F. - 13, Civil - 134, rest of Empire - 133. Available under British Flag - 293, Admiralty (large and small) - 60. There was a further tanker requirement to lift oil stocks to the Far East. Oil Board 8th Annual Report, 31/7/33, Cab. 4/22.
16. Chatfield to General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, C.I.G.S. 14/9/33, Cab. 21/369.
17. Chatfield to Hankey 15/9/33, Cab. 21/369.
18. C.I.D. 1112-B, 30/6/33, Cab. 4/22; and C.I.D. 1111-B 27/5/33, Cab. 4/22. The first report (C.I.D. 1111-B) of May 27 dealt with Japan. In many ways it was sympathetic to Japan's needs and aspirations in China, and brought out the now tired clichés about Japan's need for exports and her requirements for living space. The report suggested appeasing Japan. These views reflected those of the Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon, who had taken up Japan's case at the League when the Lytton Report was discussed in December, 1932. It was a posture that was tainted with anti-Americanism, which ran in some quarters of Government circles. See for example the C.I.G.S. Montgomery-Massingberd to Hankey memo, Sept. 20, 1933, when the C.I.G.S. stated that "personally, I would much rather go to war with the Americans ... (than the Japanese)" with whom he desired good relations. Letter in Cab. 21/369.
19. C.I.D. 1113-B, 12/10/33, Cab. 4/22; also C.O.S. 310, Cab. 4/33, and 16/109. C.P. 145(33)19.



20. The Admiralty estimated that by 1940, the I.J.N. would have nine capital ships, four aircraft carriers, and 29 cruisers - to meet this Fleet, the Royal Navy would have to send 12 capital ships, five aircraft carriers and 46 cruisers to the Far East, leaving 3 capital ships for the rest of the world. Up to 1940, the Royal Navy would have three of fifteen capital ships up for modernization. C.I.D. 1113-B, Op. Cit.
21. C.I.D. 261st meeting, 9/11/33, Cab. 2/6.
22. Hailsham mentioned that the Ten Year Assumption had been cancelled. He was referring to the 255th meeting of the C.I.D. of March 22, and the Cabinet decision of March 23, 1932, Cab. 19 (32). In the case of the former, the C.I.D. recommended the ending of the Rule, while the Cabinet's decision was only stated as offering "no dissent from the acceptance of the C.I.D. of the recommendations of the C.O.S. in favour of cancelling the assumption." This did not end the Rule. The only action the Cabinet took was to agree to speed up the Singapore project. See C.I.D. 374-C and 257th meeting, and C.I.D. 297-C and 231st meeting. Many historians have made the same mistake of assuming the Rule ended in 1932. For example, Hankey wrote to MacDonald 16/1/33 that "no-one knows if the Rule stands or not". Cab. 63/46.
23. C.P. 362(32) 28/10/32.
24. Cab. 62(33) 15/11/33.
25. Hankey to P.M. 18/12/33, terms of reference D.R.C. by C.O.S., C.I.D. 1113-B, Cab. 21/4/39; also C.I.D. 261st meeting 9/11/33. Op. Cit.
26. P.M. to Hankey and Fisher D.C.(M) 9/3/34. Cab. 21/439.
27. D.R.C. 3rd meeting 15/12/33, Cab. 16/109.
28. D.R.C. 6th meeting Forecast by C.N.S. 20/12/33, Cab. 16/109.





29. Fisher to D.R.C., D.R.C. (9) 12/1/34, Cab. 16/109.
30. D.R.C. meetings of 18 and 19/1/34, Cab. 16/109.
31. Fisher to Hankey 29/1/34, D.R.C. (12), Cab. 16/109.
32. Fisher to Hankey 12/2/34, D.R.C. (16), Cab. 16/109.
33. K. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, London, 1946, p. 253.
34. Fisher Addendum, D.R.C. (19), 17/2/39, Cab. 16/109.
35. D.R.C. 14 (34) 28/2/34 and Cab. 16/109, C.P. 64(34). Also C.I.D. 1147-B, Cab. 4/24.
36. The report also pointed out what Hankey had already written to the Prime Minister and what had been stated in C.I.D. 1109-B, that decay in the Private Arms Industry had set in. In modern conditions, its importance to Imperial defence "is second only to the defence services". The strength proposed by the D.R.C. was based on the one-power standard and did not allow for a large German navy, even though the possibilities of a German-Japanese combination were recognized. However, it was also assumed France would be an ally. D.P.R. 52(35) 21/11/35.

The D.R.C. standard fleet was:

Strength (1933)

Capital ships	15	15
Aircraft Carriers	8	5
Cruisers	70	50
Destroyer		
Flotillas	16	9
Submarines	53	50
Escort Vessels, etc.	120	51

37. As the D.R.C. noted, "if instead of cutting down the estimates of the defence services year by year, it had been possible to maintain them at the figure of 1928-1929, an additional sum of £27,500,000 would have been available for Imperial defence and some of our worst deficiencies would be non-existent". The report showed that only Britain had reduced defence spending over the years, while other nations



37. (continued)

had increased theirs: the defence services had their estimates cut between 1924 to 1931 by £21 million. It also pointed out that spending on arms had a labour value which was high in comparison to many of the unemployment relief works which the State had undertaken. It also provided "experience and opportunity for the designers, technicians and craftsmen in a very wide range of industry". Lord Weir's letter to the Times, 17/11/33. Lord Weir had been Minister to aircraft production in the First World War and had been appointed to the Committee of Industrialists to advise the Supply Board on industrial matters in December 1933. He later became advisor on aircraft production when he wrote to Baldwin that "the technical structure of our production is too weak to carry such a load". G.M. Young, Stanley Baldwin, London, 1951, p. 201.

38. Cab. 80 (34), 14/3/34.

39. Chamberlain, at a further Cabinet meeting held on the 19th of March (Cab. 10(34) ) noted that "if the disarmament discussions do not end in agreement and even if there is an agreement involving a substantial rearmament of Germany ... Germany's power will soon make her a potential danger to others. In these circumstances, the Cabinet must without delay consider the following courses: joining in arranging to further security against breaking the peace; facing further very heavy expenditure on armaments. It is recommended by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the first course be followed, and that some form of international partnership in Europe under which each signatory undertakes to supply specified force of limited liability for use against an aggressor." This idea was dear to Chamberlain, who always wanted to avoid paying the cost of defence. See Feiling Op. Cit. p. 252. Chamberlain's Diary entry of March 25, 1934 read: "Either we must play our part in pacification or we must resign ourselves to the staggering prospect of spending £85 million on rearmament. It might be that we could limit our liabilities."





40. The history of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was trundled out, with the reason for its demise, with particular reference to the views of Canada, and the negotiations before and during the Imperial Conference of 1921. It was interesting that the Cabinet Ministers were so unaware of the history of the Alliance. See C.P. 78(34) 13/3/34.
41. N.C.(M) 35(1) and D.C.(M) (32) 125 23/3/34. The memo was composed by Chatfield, Robert Craigie (F.O.), Vansittart (F.O.), R.A. Robert Bailey, Captain Stewart King, D.C.N.O. The naval staff stated that Britain would require 150 armed merchant cruisers and cruisers for a Far Eastern war. In 1934, the Royal Navy had 50. The British always wished to get away from the Washington Conference, London Naval Treaty of a 10,000 ton, 8" cruiser. They wanted a limit of 7,000 tons and 6" guns. The naval staff also demanded a 5:3 ratio with Japan for the M class, 9,000 ton cruisers, 10,000 ton 8" cruisers. The worry was that Japan's 8" cruisers would destroy the smaller British 6" cruisers which were on trade protection duties. In an addendum to the memo dated March 24, Chatfield noted that "the morale of the Fleet is affected by the knowledge that the battle fleet is getting past its day. It is highly desirable for the personnel to maintain confidence in our ships, and especially in the battle fleet." N.C.(M) (35) 1 24/3/34.
42. Fisher memo 19/4/34, Cab. 16/111.
43. Note. Chamberlain 10 C.I.D. 19/4/33, Cab. 16/11.
44. Britain's policy towards Japan has been outlined by Louis, who stated that "if appeasement means buying off a potential aggressor at the sacrifice of principle, then the British stand acquitted in the case of Japan". Louis, Op. Cit., p. 238. As Louis points out, the Foreign Office consistently took a hard line towards Japan, particularly Sir Alexander Cadogan, Sir John Pratt, and Sir John Brenan. For their views, and others, see Sir John Pratt, War and Policies in China, London, 1943. D. Dilks, The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, London, 1971. On the other hand, Churchill, Simon, Chamberlain and Fisher all were in favour of making a deal with the Japanese. James, Op. Cit., pp. 257-58.



45. C.P. 113(34) 20/4/34.
46. It should be recognized that while the Treasury and successive Chancellors talked of money resources, the fact was that when rearmament finally got fully underway, money was not the problem. The real problem was that the Ten Year Rule had reduced the skilled labour force (who had left the shipbuilding industry), the berths available, the heavy arms companies, the numerical strength of the Corps of Naval Constructors. This was the real legacy of the Ten Year Rule: the whiffling away of Britain's capability to produce the weapons to meet the demands of a major war. See Postan, Op. Cit., Chap. 11, part 5. Also O. Parkes, British Battleships, London, 1956, pp. 660, 662.
47. D.C. (M) 116, 6/6/34. The Committee had received a note from Vansittart which dealt with Anglo-Japanese relations and the question of naval parity. The memo noted that Japan was confronted with serious economic problems, including industrial expansion and population growth and due to these problems, insisted on expanding into Manchuria and China. The British Ambassador in Tokyo had cabled that (Tele. 91, 18/5/34) - what could Britain offer in place of not allowing Japan parity - the only deal Britain could make was to give China to Japan which British public opinion might not tolerate. Britain might possibly convince Japan that H.M.G. was ready to help solve the Sino-Japanese conflict (by offering her good offices) and possibly help persuade the United States to accept a compromise solution. "Japan walks in some fear as she feels that if she fights the U.S.S.R., she will face a hostile America and a bitter China." Memo NC (M) (35)-8, 23/5/34.
48. At a further meeting of the Ministerial Committee, D.C. (M) 32 123 11/7/34 16/111, Chamberlain fought against any real expansion of the fleet air arm. It was pointed out that this policy would leave the new aircraft carrier Ark Royal without its full complement of aircraft. This would occur at a rate proposed of 1 sqn. of 12 for 1934, allowing  $3\frac{1}{2}$  additional by 1938, making a total of 38, giving the fleet air arm 151 aircraft. The only way Ark Royal could get aircraft would be if another carrier was out of commission.





49. Diary entry, 12/5/34, Feiling Op. Cit., p. 258.
50. Chancellor of the Exchequer, D.C. (M) (32) 120 20/6/34.
51. See C.P. 87(38), Cab. 18 (38)8 6/4/38, Cab. 53/38, 7/11/38 and Postan Op. Cit., p. 13.
52. Hankey to Lord President, 23/6/34, Cab. 21/434.
53. Hankey had always been a sea power advocate. See for example his comments on conscription for the Army in 1908, M.P.A. Hankey, The Supreme Command, London, 1961, Vol. 1, p. 137. Also M.V. Brett, ed. Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, London, 1934, Vol. III, p. 175. and S. Roskill, Hankey-Man of Secrets, London, 1970, Vol. I, p. 103.
54. Fisher to Chatfield, 11/7/34, Cab. 21/434.
55. Chatfield to Fisher, 16/7/34, Cab. 21/434.
56. The issue was not only whom to arm against whom, but how to do it on the cheap. Here Chamberlain, as noted, was for the Air Force as a deterrent against Germany. But while the integrity of the Low Countries, always fundamental to British Naval Policy, was seen as vital, there was no way at this time any British Government was going to place large numbers of men on the soil of Europe. Never again the blood bath of World War I, or the cost. See D.R.C., 5th, 6th and 7th and 12th meetings in Cab. 16/111. Also D.C.(M) 32 3/5/34 and C.O.S. 335, Cab. 52/53 and for a brilliant expose' of the whole question, see M. Howard, The Continental Commitment, London, 1972, Chapter 5.
57. See C. Barnett, Britain and Her Army, London, 1970, introduction and chapter 20; also Howard, Op. Cit., chapter 2; and Times 14/7/34.
58. C.P. 205 (34) 31/7/39, Cab. 4/23 and 21/434.
59. Cab. 62 (33) 15/11/33.
60. Ibid.





61. C.P. 193 (34) and MC (D) (32) 18/7/34.
62. Feiling Op. Cit., p. 258.
63. Hankey to P.M. 3/8/34, Cab. 21/297.
64. C.I.D. 399-B and C.I.D. 266th meeting 22/11/34, Cab. 2/6.
65. E. Chatfield, The Navy and Defence, London 1942, p. 247.
66. Cmd. 4827.
67. C.I.D. 269 meeting 16/4/35 2/61.
68. It is worth noting that in the summer of 1934, the Japanese Government demanded that all the oil companies operating in Japan were to store at least six months' supply of oil in Japan without any guarantees of a market for such oil. S.I.A. 1934, pp. 662-664. Simultaneously, the Japanese launched a naval building programme which was aimed to "... maintain a navy strong enough to make it impossible for another navy to gain supremacy in the Western Pacific". S.I.A. 1933, p. 542. The I.J.N. also started to expand her Fleet Air Arm fourfold, and strong emphasis was placed on carrier operations. USSBS Vol. 1, p. 53. The Japanese were also training a large surplus of naval personnel to man the fleet now under construction. Naval Staff History, B.R. 1736(50) (1) Admiralty Vol. 1, p. 12.
69. C.O.S. 372, 29/4/35, Cab. 53/24.
70. Cmd. 4930.
71. See Adm. File Anglo-German Naval Agreement, File 3377-3378, Vol. 1, Adm. 116/52. See also D.C. Watt "The Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935, an Interim Judgment", The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 27, June 1936.
72. Fortunately for Britain, the Germans opted for a long range programme which would have given them a battleship strength of 13 ships, 33 cruisers, 4 aircraft carriers, 250 U boats and large numbers of destroyer and other craft. The long range programme was to be complete by



72. (continued)  
1942. The advent of war caused the Germans to have a fleet in 1939 less than they were allowed by the Treaty. See Roskill, The War ... Vol. 1, pp. 52-53. Also Flag Capt. F.O. Ruge, "The German Navy", Brassey's Naval Annual, 1937, pp. 84-86.
73. Chatfield, It Might ... Op. Cit., pp. 73-74.
74. Churchill, Vol. 1, Op. Cit. p. 110. Though Churchill was not so critical of the Treaty at the time, see James, Op. Cit., pp. 254-55.
75. A. Martienssen, Hitler and His Admirals, London 1948, p. 11.
76. D.P.R. (6), D.C. (M), 32(145), 11/7/35, Cab. 4/23. Hankey had made a speech which was exactly what the D.R.C. reported on 7/6/35. D.R.C. 26, Cab. 16/112.
77. D.R.C. (25), and D.P.R. (12), 6/8/35, Cab. 16/138. For a Research of the meetings of the D.R.C., see Cab. 16/112, also D.P.R., (12), 8/4/35, Cab. 16/138.
78. C.O.S. 392, 8/8/35, D.P.R.(13), Cab. 16/138, and Cab. 53/25.
79. D.R.C. 15th meeting, 4/10/35, Cab. 16/112.
80. See Naval Pink List 1935, and D.P.R. (26), 2/10/35, Cab. 16/138.
81. D.R.C. meeting, 10/10/35, Cab. 16/112.
82. The C.O.S. had noted in a report "Strategical Situation in the Far East" with particular reference to Hong Kong, that "our problem in the Far East is now further complicated by the apparent possibility of our becoming involved in commitments in support of the League of Nations, and the prospect of being faced with a war in the Far East at a time when complications in Europe necessitated the retention of part of the whole of our Fleet, is one of the gravest significance". C.O.S. 405 10/10/35, Cab. 55/25.





83. D.R.C. 18th meeting, 18/10/35, Cab. 16/112.
84. "Limited Liability" - the doctrine Great Britain could not take part in a European war with large land forces. The basis of the doctrine was the memory of the blood-letting of World War I and the inability of the British to maintain the strength of all three services. On February 10, 1938, the C.I.D. confirmed that in matters of supply, all war plans should be based on what might be termed on a war of limited liability. This meant that the army equipment for five divisions was to be kept down to the level of "colonial warfare and operations in the Eastern theatre". See D.R.C. 14, 28/2/34, Op. Cit., and C.P. 26(38), 10/2/38, C.P. 27 (39), 27/1/39.
85. D.R.C. (37) D.P.R. (52) 21/11/35, Cab. 4/24 and 16/139.
86. See C.P. 30(38) 14/2/38, Cab. 24/274. C.P. 26(36), 12/2/36, Cab. 23/84. Also Feiling Op. Cit., p. 313-316. Also Postan, Op. Cit., Chap. 11, and "Sentinel", "British Warship Building Resources", Brassey's Naval Annual, 1934, pp. 98-101.
87. Yet the posture of the French during the Mediterranean crisis, particularly as M. Pierre Laval was conducting French foreign affairs, left the British with no other opinion except that France was unreliable. For information relating to conversations with the French, see D.P.R. (50), D.P.R. (45) 2/11/35, and 13th meeting, 5/11/35, D.P.R. (8) 17/9/35, all in Cab. 16/139. Also D.P.R. (75) 10/1/36, Cab. 16/140 and C.O.S. 423 Cab. 53/26. See also Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, London, 1954, p. 179. Vansittart in early 1934 had written to Hankey that "we cannot in all circumstances count on France". See Vansittart to Hankey, 12/3/34, 6/3/34, and Hankey to Vansittart, 5/3/34, Cab. 21/434. Hankey was pro-French. Vansittart argued that to a large extent, British policy and weakness had convinced the French that "Britain is at least 60% or 70% pro-German.
88. See for example J.P. S.C. Report, J.P. 105, 4th revision, 1/11/35, Cab. 55/8.



89. Ibid.
90. See R.R. James ed. Memoirs of a Conservative, Memoirs and Papers of J. C.C. Davidson, London 1969, p. 140. Also Felling, Op. Cit., pp. 269-70.
91. R.K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, Stanley Baldwin, London, 1969, pp. 793-800., see also Churchill, Op. Cit., Vol. I, p. 140.
92. Chatfield to Hankey, 14/1/36, Cab. 21/422A.
93. Memo 9/1/35 D.P.R. (4), Cab. 16/123.
94. D.P.R., 5th meeting, 20/1/36, Cab. 16/135.
95. D.P.R. (79), 5/2/36, Cab. 16/140.
96. D.P.R. (DR) (9), February, 1935, Cab. 4/24.
97. Cmd. 5107, 3/3/36.
98. C.O.S. (36) 442, 18/3/36, Cab. 53/27 and 168 meeting, 17/3/36, Cab. 53/5. Also C.I.D. 1224-B, Cab. 4/24, and D.P.R. 19th meeting 23/3/36, Cab. 16/139 and C.O.S. 135 meeting, 1/4/35, Cab. 55/7 and C.O.S. 441 1/4/36, Cab. 55/5.
99. C.O.S. 178th meeting, 16/6/36, Cab. 55/6, and C.O.S. 447, 18/6/36, Cab. 53/28.
100. For the shortages and problems of Defence Production, see Cab. 16/136, and Cab. 4/25, particularly meetings of the D.P.R. 2/7/36, 25/5/36, 22/10/36, and 26/11/36, all in Cab. 16/136, and Reports: Principle Supply Officers Committee 557 30/6/36, Cab. 4/25.
101. Report of the Ministry of Labour, D.P.R.(112) 7/8/36, Cab. 16/140. See also D.P.R.(83) 1/6/36, 16/140, D.P.R.(96) 2/6/36, Cab. 116/140, and D.P.R.(104) 21/7/36, Cab. 16/140.
102. D.P.R. 21st meeting, 25/5/36, Cab. 16/136.



103. D.P.R. 24th meeting, 2/7/36, Cab. 16/36.
104. J.P.S.C. 164, C.O.S. 506, 29/7/36, Cab. 53/28. Also Cab. 36/8 and C.P. 211 (36), Cab. 23/84. See also memo by Eden, C.P. 165 (36), Cab. 24/230 J.P. 186/22/12/36, Cab. 55/8. Also C.O.S. 525 9/11/36, Cab. 53/29.
105. The Navy was also facing a shortage of recruits. They wanted to increase the basic pay from 7/- to 10/- a week. There was a particular shortage of Artificers (ERA's) and recruits were not forthcoming. This was attributed to the Trade Unions not seeing a naval career as offering status, a lack of co-operation by the Labour Exchanges who would not steer skilled men to the Navy, early marriage, a growing labour shortage in industry with a rise in wages, but above all, the socialistic, pacifistic views of the staff at the Labour Exchanges, the anti-Navy, anti-armaments attitude of the Trade Unions and Local Authorities, particularly in places such as Glasgow and Liverpool, and the incessant pacifist anti-war, anti-military propaganda in the schools, churches, cinema, and local governments. D.P.R. (95) and (119), 17/6 and 11/10/36, Cab. 16/140 and 20th and 23rd meetings 7/5 and 18/6/36, Cab. 16/139.
106. J.P.S.C., 140th meeting, 16/6/36, Cab. 55/2.
107. There was a further complication concerning the Far East policy, the role of the R.A.F. Capt. Tom Phillips, D.N.O., replied somewhat tartly to a J.P. appreciation concerning the R.A.F.'s possible replacement of the Royal Navy as the defender of Singapore. In the absence of war experience, under modern conditions between first class powers on the potentialities of air attack, he could not subscribe to this view. He could not accept that the R.A.F. in all circumstances could prevent the establishment of an advanced base (by the Japanese). The J.P. reported that "an accurate balance between the points of view expressed could only emerge in the light of war experience". J.P. 140th meeting, 16/6/36, Cab. 55/2.
108. For details concerning the anti-comintern pact, see Jones, Op. Cit., pp. 25-26, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Documents, 1939, pp. 297-99, and M.





108. (continued)  
Shigemetsu, Japan and her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace,  
N.Y. 1958, pp. 216-17, 224, 225.
109. Cmd. 5374.
110. C.P. 30(38), 14/2/38, Cab. 24/274.
111. C.P. 26(36), 12/2/36, Cab. 24/227.  
The seriousness of the rearmament delays and shortages can be assessed by the fact that at a meeting of the D.P.R., it was suggested that "advantage be taken of recent offers to draw on Germany for AA guns and ammunition". This suggestion was not followed up due to problems of training of troops for the weapons, spare parts, and ammunition supplied. D.P.R. (14), 22/11/35, Cab. 16/139. At the 33rd meeting, it was suggested that Britain buy a German forge for the manufacture of bomb casings. This was turned down on political grounds. D.P.R. 33rd meeting, 21/1/37, Cab. 16/137. The Swedish Bofors firm was asked to give British orders priority for 100, 40mm Bofors guns and it was reported that "more reliance can be placed on deliveries from Sweden than on deliveries from this country at present". D.P.R. 26th meeting, 18/3/37, and 29th meeting, 29/4/37, Cab. 16/137. The desperate shortage of AA guns meant that within the rearmament programme, priorities kept getting shifted to the detriment of all three services, a situation aggravated by an equally grim shortage of machine tools, skilled labour and steel. See Cab. 16/137. The Cabinet still did not agree to long term contracts for industry. D.P.R. 44th meeting 21/10/37, or the moving of men from civil production to military aircraft production. "Such an act cannot be contemplated." D.P.R. 33rd meeting, 21/1/37, Cab. 16/137.
112. C.I.D. 288th meeting, 11/2/37, Cab. 2/6. For the list of shortages, see for example 4.7" guns and gun control equipment. See D.P.R. 38th meeting, 22/3/37, Cab. 16/137, and D.P.R. 44th meeting, 21/10/37, Ibid. Also C.I.D. 1247-B, and 1353-B, Cab. 4/26.



CHAPTER V

THE AUSTRALASIAN FACTOR AND NAVAL STRATEGY

The anger of the two Pacific Dominions had been made plain when MacDonald's Government decided to cease construction of the Singapore base in 1929. The British promise that a fleet would proceed East in an emergency, was the foundation of their defence preparations. That promise enabled both Dominions to agree to the dispatch, when the time came, of expeditionary forces to serve in theatres of operations thousands of miles from their own shores. Furthermore, it induced both Dominions to put their main effort of defence preparations into ships rather than aircraft or land forces.

In Australia, there was always a nagging doubt about the capability of the Royal Navy to arrive in the Far East on time and in force.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Army, with a certain amount of self-interest in mind, always questioned the wisdom of putting Australian defence eggs into the naval basket.<sup>2</sup>

The Australians who questioned the Singapore project had support for their views from no less a personage than Admiral Sir Richard Webb, President of the Naval War College, who had told an audience at the Royal United Services Institute in October 1930 that

to imagine that we were going to uncover the heart of the Empire and send our Fleet thousands of miles into the Pacific, with only one base, Singapore, for our supplies and our damaged ships, is to write us down as scarcely worse than fools. Anyway, the British public would never tolerate it.<sup>3</sup>

Tolerate it or not, Imperial obligations could not be fobbed off, and the British had to take account of the Dominion views. The High Commissioners for the Dominions had been





informed in May 1934 that there would be consultation before any major decisions were made concerning Imperial defence.<sup>4</sup> There had been a certain amount of consultation, the tempo of which increased as a result of Japanese actions in China, 1931-1932. In January 1934, for the first time in almost ten years, the Flag Officers of the R.A.N., R.N.Z.N., and the R.N. met on board H.M.S. Kent at Singapore to discuss Far Eastern defence.<sup>5</sup>

The officers were to consider and co-ordinate plans for the defence of Singapore, during the period before relief; the concentration of naval forces to insure safe arrival of reinforcements; and the situation after the arrival of the British main fleet.<sup>6</sup>

The most important part of the conference concerned stationing two British battle cruisers at Singapore. These had been asked for in 1933, but the C-in-C China station had been informed that it was politically out of the question, as it might well provoke Japan.<sup>7</sup> The conference suggested that these political objections were overruled by the fact that Japan might attack Singapore before the defences were ready; and that the addition of a squadron of battle cruisers to be based on Singapore had been the assumption on which all arrangements for Imperial defence in Eastern waters, including coastal defence, had been made in recent years.<sup>8</sup>

The conference repeated what had so often been said before: that the basic requirements for the naval defence in the Far East were a battle cruiser squadron, six 8" cruisers, modern A.S.D.I.C. (anti-submarine) destroyers and an increase in the submarine flotilla from 12 to 21.<sup>9\*</sup>

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\* The Admiralty sent H.M.S. Terror (a Monitor of 7,200 tons, 2 x 15" guns, plus eight 4" guns) instead.



The fast battle cruiser squadron was needed to protect the troop transports, to spearhead the main fleet, to give cover to the light forces sweeping against the Japanese, and to contain Japanese cruisers moving in from the North Pacific.

The loss of Singapore, the conference noted, would so undermine public morale in the Pacific Dominions, that "their trust in and great loyalty to the Mother Country would be so damaged that years might pass before confidence was restored".<sup>10\*</sup>

While the conference was in progress, any hopes concerning the stationing of a battle cruiser squadron on Singapore were quashed by the constant opposition of Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer to any substantial increases in the service estimates that had been recommended by the D.R.C.<sup>11</sup>

It will be recalled that Chamberlain had reduced the D.R.C.'s proposed expenditures from £97 million to £59 million. He had informed his colleagues in 1934, on the ministerial committees that "while we must (if only in good faith to the Dominions) proceed to complete Singapore and its essential approaches ... we must postpone the idea of sending out to it a fleet of capital ships capable of containing the Japanese Fleet and of meeting it in battle."<sup>12</sup>

The other members of the committee were appalled by his suggestion. The First Lord stressed that it would imply the ending of British sea power, "a policy which is not even advocated by the Communists in this country". Other ministers

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\* The report was signed by Capt. F. Burgess-Watson, O.C.N.Z., Station; Vice-Admiral G.F. Hyde, R.A.N.; Vice-Admiral M.E. Dunbar-Naismith, O.C. East Indies; and Admiral F.C. Dreyer, C-in-C China Station.



were profoundly worried about the effect such a policy would have on Imperial relations. J.H. Thomas, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, felt that the Dominions might easily charge us with a breach of faith, while Sir John Simon expressed his concern that such an action might suggest that "this was a definite sign that the old country was going down hill".

No one was more angry than Hankey. All his Imperialist sentiments were aroused. The D.R.C. report of 1934 was much of his making, for he had been chairman of the committee. Moreover, he was then about to embark on a tour of Australia and New Zealand, and his position would be more than embarrassing if he had to explain to the Dominions a sudden and fundamental change in British Far Eastern naval policy.

Hankey therefore intimated that he would not go on his trip unless he had reaffirmation of Britain's traditional Far Eastern policy. He was in a strong position to coerce the Cabinet, for a cancellation of his visit at the eleventh hour would have aroused suspicions in the Pacific Dominions. In a letter to the Lord President,\* Baldwin,<sup>13</sup> Hankey stated on July 30, 1934, that "as I explained to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the European-first policy must not interfere with the object of enabling the fleet to proceed to Singapore in any major emergency in the Far East."

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\* One might ask why he did not address himself to MacDonald, who was after all, the Chairman of the Ministerial Committee and Prime Minister. The reason appears to be that MacDonald's regime was coming to a close and effective leadership had largely passed into Baldwin's hands. Feiling Op. Cit., p. 260.





He went on to explain:

"The principle on which all of these reports are based (the defence of Australia and New Zealand) is that there will be a naval base at Singapore sufficiently strongly defended to hold out until the arrival of the main fleet of capital ships, which thereafter provides the shield to cover the whole of our interests in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean."

"I can not conceive any alternative system of defence of our Imperial interests in the Far East", Hankey wrote, "including those of the Dominions, that is not based on our centuries-old assumption of sea power". Any failure of Britain not to do her part would "lead to the break-up of the Empire."

Faced with this intransigence on Hankey's part, and not altogether in agreement with Chamberlain's proposals, Baldwin signed an aide-memoire<sup>14</sup> which pacified Hankey and allowed him to proceed overseas. This document stated that "with the object of enabling the fleet to proceed to Singapore in any major emergency in the Far East, it is the intention of H.M.G. in the U.K.

1. to complete the first stage of the defences of the Singapore base by 1938;
2. to proceed with the plans for the defence of the fueling stations East of Suez;
3. to make good the deficiencies of the Navy as financial conditions permit.

Armed with Baldwin's aide-memoire and the D.R.C. report, Hankey left on his mission to the Pacific Dominions.

Within Australia, there had always been criticism from the Labour Party of Australia's adherence to the Imperialist

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\* Italics - Hankey's.



concept of defence. Always more "Australia first" than their Conservative-Liberal opponents, they often advocated concentration on home defences, which stressed the role of the R.A.A.F. and land forces based in Australia.<sup>15</sup> They held office under J.H. Scullin from 1929-1931. In 1932, a non-Labour Government under J.A. Lyons had returned to power; and with his administration came a willingness to increase Australia's defence spending. As before, the main effort was to be put into the R.A.N., which would, in time of war, co-operate with the R.N. in the Far East. It was a propitious time for Hankey to arrive.

Hankey met with the Australian Defence Committee<sup>16</sup>, which later reported to Lyons that the problem of Australia's defence "turns on the ability of the main British fleet to proceed East of Suez and on the availability of a naval base at Singapore from which it can operate". The Committee noted that "if the ability of the main British fleet to move East of Suez in any circumstances and the availability of the naval base at Singapore are accepted, there can be no criticism of the estimates of the scale of attack given the Australian C.N.S.". This scale of attack accorded with Hankey's remarks to the Committee, in which he reiterated the assessment made on the C.I.D. in 1932.<sup>17</sup> As Hankey put it, as long as Singapore held, the Japanese could not afford to dispatch their fleet units south, for they would always be uncertain as to when the R.N. would arrive and sever their lines of communication, which were very vulnerable. "Such an enterprise ... would be very unsound strategy, such as a nation like Japan would not be likely to adopt."

The Committee noted that Singapore after 15 years, was still not completed; that the fueling stations along the route





were still badly defended; and wondered if the British would allow their fleet to go East if there was a war in Europe. In reply to these criticisms and questions, Hankey said that Britain was accelerating the completion of the Singapore base; that British interests in the Far East were so profound that even if there was a war in Europe, the fleet would be sent. As for British public opinion refusing to countenance the dispatch of the fleet, Hankey reminded the Committee that in 1914, public opinion was against the sending of the B.E.F. to France, but it went anyway.

Hankey's calm assertion that the British Government would sanction the sending of a fleet to the Far East, and his claim that it would be in a position to do so, did not correspond with the facts as they had emerged in the Ministerial Committee meetings, the various D.R.C. meetings in London, and the reports of the C.O.S. While all three groups paid lip service to the East-of-Suez-fleet-concept, and placed British defence in the Far East among the most immediate priorities, the rise of German strength had raised doubts about the wisdom of the whole idea.<sup>18</sup> And in Australia, a bright group of Army staff officers who examined Hankey's evidence were already casting doubts on the "main fleet to Singapore" thesis.

Major-General J.H. Bruce,<sup>19</sup> the Australian C.G.S., claimed that: "To these authorities (in Whitehall), the defence of Australia is but an incident in a world-wide problem", adding: "an important incident perhaps, but nevertheless ... overshadowed by other aspects of the problem of much greater importance to the Empire constituted as a whole"... "Nowhere", Bruce wrote, "in the documents dealing with British commitments in the Far East can there be found an investigation of Japan's probable



political object, nor the corollary, her probable military objective."

Scrutinizing the C.I.D. report with its fundamental principle that the defence of the Far East is secure, "provided that the British fleet arrived in time and finds a properly-equipped base at Singapore", Bruce suggested that the radius of action from Singapore to Australia was 3,000 miles west in a direct line to Australia. Thus the British fleet at Singapore would have only an indirect influence on Japanese lines of communication. "Nevertheless, the moral effect of the fleet in being, even at so great a distance (from Japan), will probably be a great deterrent and I am prepared to concede that the presence of a superior British fleet would quite probably put a large-scale invasion of Australia out of the question at least until the outcome of the naval battle and thereafter, if the British forces are successful in the battle". Like Admiral Webb, whom he quoted, Bruce had reservations about the fleet arriving if Britain was involved in Europe. Nor was he convinced that once it did arrive, it would win the naval battle, as "... the Japanese forces will be little, if any, inferior to the British forces in efficiency and determination". Bruce noted Churchill's prophetic statement that "Jellicoe was the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon". The inference Bruce drew was that the same could occur in the Pacific if the British lost the naval battle. He strongly advocated less reliance on the Royal Navy and more reliance on Australian ground and air forces as the protectors of Australia. Bruce's C.O.S., Col. J.D. Lavarack\*,

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\* Lavarack had written in 1933 that Singapore was exposed from the land side. See Wigmore, Op. Cit., p. 8, and fn. Lavarack, Lt. Gen. Sir John, G.S.O., 1 4th Aust.



had equally strong criticisms of Hankey's report.<sup>20</sup> He doubted if Britain could regain her old position of sea supremacy as she lacked the economic power to outbuild the other naval powers. Lavarack further pointed out that "Japan represents a factor strange to British naval experience, a first-class naval power situated on the opposite side of the globe."

As he saw it, Britain would have to send her whole Fleet to achieve a 15-9 ratio over Japan, to a base 10,000 miles from England where everything would have to be ready to repair and maintain it. He thought this a hazardous operation, and felt that Hankey was not qualified to deal with technical details, but only with broad strategy.

The points made by Bruce and Lavarack were valid. The Royal Navy was not as yet physically ready to fight a war thousands of miles away from its home bases, a fact that was to be amply demonstrated in World War II.

Naturally enough, the Australian First Naval Member and C.N.S. Vice-Admiral Sir George Hyde,\* did not agree with his

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Div. W.W.I.C. of S.C.G.S., 1935-39, G.O.C. Southern Command, 1939-40, O.C. 7th div. 1940-41, Aust. Corps. 1941-42, First Aust. Army, 1942-44. Gov. of Queensland 1946, born Melbourne.

\* It was to be expected that the Australian Naval Board would side with the R.N. Hyde had been born in England and served in the R.N. for the first 23 years of his naval career before transferring to the R.A.N. in 1913. Capt. William Ford, R.A.N. was a British Officer on loan to the R.A.N.





Army counterpart. He claimed that Japan's strategy was not to meet the R.N. in battle, a policy that ran counter to her naval policy. She did not have the merchant ships to conduct more than one major expedition at a time, and she would not attack Australia. He did agree that a fleet at Singapore would not stop such an attack, but British interests in Asia demanded that a fleet be sent. What was needed was a navy for trade protection.

The Australian naval staff's view prevailed, and along with Hankey's visit and British prompting that Australia should concentrate on building up her naval forces, the Member of State for Defence, Robert Parkhill, announced a naval building programme in October 1935.<sup>21</sup>

The Singapore mystique and the fleet East of Suez had once again carried all before it.<sup>22</sup>

It will be recalled that the tender balance of British naval strength in relation to Imperial defence had led to the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty. This Treaty, signed without consultation with Britain's friends or with the Dominions, had been followed quickly by the Italian-Abyssinian dispute. The growing uncertainty surrounding the international situation led the Dominions to ask for advice and counsel, and some reassurance in respect to their defences. The C.O.S., at their 91st meeting, discussed a report by the J.P.S.C. and drafted telegrams to be sent to the Dominions in respect to defence. The opinion of the C.O.S. did not differ from all the previous reports and recommendations: the fleet would be sent, Singapore was vital, and the Dominions should concentrate on naval defence, particularly building cruisers and sloops.<sup>23</sup>

On June 1, 1936, the New Zealand Government asked Whitehall about the best way to spend their defence budget. The



view in New Zealand was that the Air Force should get the major share and that the former emphasis on the Navy should possibly be downgraded.<sup>24</sup> In reply to the New Zealand Governor-General, the Secretary of State for the Dominions summarized the Admiralty's view, emphasizing to the New Zealand Government "that the fundamental basis of the Empire defence lies in the ability of the Empire to send a fleet to any part that is threatened". If the R.N. was unable to carry out this responsibility, the "whole basis of Imperial defence crumbles". Thus the advice tendered to New Zealand was to continue spending her defence budgets on her Navy and not to become enamoured with thoughts of "local defence" and air forces.<sup>25</sup>

It was against this background of arguments over defence spending, British capability to defend their interests in the Far East, and questions of Far Eastern naval strategy coupled with the worsening international situation, that the 1937 Imperial Conference assembled in London.

In preparation for it,<sup>26</sup> the C.I.D. met to discuss a draft report on Imperial defence written by the C.O.S. Chamberlain informed the Committee that "on the whole, he felt that the entire tone of the report was unduly pessimistic and it was undesirable to paint that black a picture for the Dominions". Sir Samuel Hoare agreed in part with Chamberlain, but suggested a middle ground - a report that was "not too rosy", with a paragraph to counteract any pessimism in the conclusion of the review.

Regardless of how "rosy" or "unduly pessimistic" the report might be,<sup>27</sup> the British Government had to tread a narrow path when dealing with the Pacific Dominions. They had to convince them that the fleet East of Suez still held good, for to say otherwise would end co-operation in Imperial defence as





the Dominions hurriedly concentrated on local defence. On the other hand, too definite a promise concerning the defence of the Far East might lead to the Dominions becoming slack in providing for any type of armed forces for Imperial defence. It was a very fine line indeed.

Much of the British problem lay not just in her lack of armaments, but was the result of policy decisions made in 1933 (largely at Chamberlain's insistence), that Italy be excluded from those nations against whom Britain had to prepare to fight. Unfortunately for British naval calculations, the Chamberlain hypothesis no longer held, and Italy had to be added to the Admiralty's list of potential enemies.

Thus Chatfield's stress on diplomatic means to eliminate potential enemies, had become a vital necessity; and British policy was now directed at attempting to detach Italy from Germany. British diplomacy would have to take the place of the non-existent guns; but without guns to back it up, British diplomacy carried little weight in Rome.

All these variables emerged in the several appreciations and papers that were laid before the Imperial Conference. British "Grand Strategy" was outlined, and merits examination in some detail.

The major paper presented was the Review of Imperial Defence by the C.O.S.,<sup>28</sup> signed by Chatfield, E.L. Ellington and C.J.J. Deverell, Chief of Air Staff (now C.A.S.). The report began by quoting their Annual Review of 1935, in which the defence priorities had been stated as follows:

The Defence of possessions and interests in the Far East;  
European commitments, and  
The Defence of India against Soviet aggression.

Unfortunately, things had changed since then. Germany



was rearming and showing increasingly aggressive tendencies. In the Mediterranean, Italy's aggression had had the result of driving her and France apart, and bringing the Italian Government into closer relations with the German Government. Further afield, in the Far East, the recent anti-Communist pact between Japan and Germany of November 1936, "may prove to have increased the risk of our being involved in war simultaneously in Europe and in the Far East".

The decline in the League, and the emergence of powerful armed "unscrupulous" states, led the C.O.S. to state that they based their appreciation of the situation "upon facts and reasoned probabilities, rather than upon the assumption that other powers will act more altruistically in the future than in the past".

The increase in tension at both ends of the world meant that the armed strength of the Empire had to be increased to an extent far greater than had been envisioned in 1935.

The C.O.S. noted that the "threat in Western Europe would be to Britain herself". A British defeat would destroy the whole structure of the Commonwealth, which in its present state of development would not long survive without the political, financial and military strength of the U.K. The chief threat to Britain was a German seizure of the Low Countries, and thus it was a vital British interest to support France against Germany.

Taking into account the defence problems as outlined, the C.O.S. summarized the situation:

The chief danger which Imperial defence has to face at the moment is that we are in the position of having threats at both ends of the Empire from strong military powers, i.e., Germany and Japan; while in the centre, we have lost our traditional security in the Mediterranean, owing to the rise





of an aggressive spirit in Italy accompanied by an increase in her military strength. So long as that position remains unresolved diplomatically, only very great military and financial strength can give the Empire security.

The slow pace of British rearmament meant that for at least the next three years British strength, relative to that of Germany and Japan, would not be increased. The report did, however, stress that the one diplomatic advantage Britain had obtained was the Anglo-German naval agreement, because, without limit, Britain's defence position would become untenable. Thus it was imperative to hold Germany to her voluntary limitation, and give her no reason to abandon it.

Strategically, the C.O.S. stressed that the future of the United Kingdom "and with it the future of the British Empire, is closely linked with that of France". A French defeat would "render the situation immensely difficult for the United Kingdom". It was a mastery of understatement, and the implication to the Pacific Dominions was that Far Eastern defence had been thrust into the background.

In the Pacific, Japan was aiming for hegemony in the Far East, as Germany was in Europe. The question was, which way would Japan move? It was known there were two schools of thought in Japan. The Army wanted to move west and southwards from Manchuria, while the Navy felt that the areas to seize were Siam and Borneo, the former for rubber and rice, the latter for oil.

It was the opinion of the C.O.S. that the southward move would not threaten the security of the Pacific Dominions unless it gave Japan control of forward bases for operations against Singapore. They recognized also that the integrity of the Netherlands East Indies<sup>29</sup> was a major British interest,





but this was not an interest that H.M.G. wished to have publicly known.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, the C.O.S. felt that any action that Japan took would be strongly influenced by the attitude of the United States, whose relations with her had been strained for some time. They did not doubt that Japan "would seize the opportunity afforded by a European war, in which we are involved, to further her expansionist schemes in the Far East."

Having outlined the grim nature of the alignments, actual and potential, that faced the United Kingdom and the Empire, the C.O.S. then presented in detail the rearmament programme.

They pointed out that in 1925, the Admiralty had accepted the one-power standard implicit in the 5:5:3 ratio. This would have allowed them to place a fleet in the Far East, leaving sufficient strength to secure home waters. But since 1925, the naval situation had altered. The growth of the French and Italian Fleets had led to the 1932 proposal for a safer naval standard. This standard was based on the Admiralty's being able to retain in home waters "a deterrent force" to prevent vital British terminal areas being commanded by the strongest European naval power; and in addition, would enable the Admiralty to redeploy the Fleet to cope with a Far Eastern war. However, even the 1932 standard was not sufficient, because the process of disengaging British naval forces in the East, and deploying them in home waters might take so long as to lead to disaster. Alternatively, if Britain were engaged in a European war, a large portion of the Empire would be left at the mercy of an aggressor. The C.O.S. therefore recommended a new standard of naval strength based on the following:

- (i) To enable us to place a fleet in the Far East fully adequate to act on the defensive and to serve as a strong deterrent against



any threat to our interest in that part of the globe;

- (ii) To maintain in all circumstances in home waters, a force able to meet the requirements of a war with Germany at the same time.

Having thus presented the broad picture, the C.O.S. returned to the strategy to be employed in the event of a war with Japan. "The basic strategic position", in their opinion, "depended upon the presence of the British fleet in Far Eastern waters. The strength of the fleet that could be sent to the Far East must be governed by consideration of our home requirements."\*

This was rather different from the former hard commitment to send a fleet to the Far East which could meet the Japanese in battle. All the former strategic assumptions based on a war with Japan alone were therefore being eroded.

The C.O.S. reported that three British capital ships would be in dock for modernization until the middle of 1939. With the present unsettled state of international relations, they were unsure if the necessary notice could be given to enable them to be ready at the outbreak of war. Therefore, "we should only be able to send to the Far East a fleet approximately equal to that of Japan, in which circumstances our strategy against Japan will probably, in the initial stages, be mainly defensive".

It was conceded that as Singapore was vital for the maintenance of the British fleet, and the presence of that fleet would be a dominating factor in the strategic situation, Japan might attempt to seize bases within air-striking range of Singapore - but:

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\* Italics - author's





In any such operations, however, Japan will always be faced with the certainty of having to fight a fleet action with us on the arrival of our fleet off Singapore. The defeat of the Japanese Fleet would imperil their home country. To fight our fleet off Singapore, at a great distance from her own repair bases, Japan would require a considerable superiority. This superiority she does not possess. Hence it appears unlikely that Japan would embark on major operations against Singapore, although in view of the decisive results at stake, the possibility of such action can never be definitely excluded. Japan might, however, carry out raids against Singapore, with the object of damaging the base facilities.

Japan might also try to capture bases in the Dutch East Indies and Borneo, or delay the fleet by submarine attack\* and minelaying activities to produce a favourable condition for her own fleet action.

The C.O.S. however assumed that a British fleet would arrive at Singapore, would be in a position to maintain the position in the Far East as it existed, and would prevent any further aggression. Once the fleet was at Singapore, the risk of Japanese attack on India, Australia or New Zealand, would be reduced to that of raids only; and even this risk would be slight.

The report summed up the major features of British policy in the case of a war with Japan as follows:

- (a) The provision at Singapore of all facilities necessary for its use by the fleet as a base, and the organization of its defences so that even if the Japanese attempt major operations

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\* In fact, the Japanese submarine force proved to be almost ineffective during the Pacific war. They were deployed in support of fleet operations, not as an independent arm of the Navy, since their technological capability was inferior to either



against it, they would have small prospects of establishing themselves in a position from which to deny the use of the base to the fleet on its arrival.

- (b) The immediate dispatch of the fleet to the Far East.
- (c) Action against the trans-Pacific trade route of Japan.

The Dominions had a part to play in the strategy thus outlined. They could maintain army and air units for service at Singapore; co-operate in actions designed to stop Japanese seizure of bases in the East Indies, New Guinea or Borneo; and they might maintain army and air force units in peace time at Singapore as part of the permanent garrison.

There was still the problem of the security of the Mediterranean route. If Italy was at war with Britain, any convoy battle would necessitate a fleet action. Hence, if Italy were at war with the U.K., the Cape route would become exceedingly important. Because of the great strain that a war with Italy would produce on British resources, not to mention British Far Eastern naval strategy, it was of prime importance that Italy was courted to re-establish friendly relations with the U.K.

The C.O.S. went on to state that the French could be

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the German U boats or American submarines, and they were easily tracked down and sunk. It also appeared that unlike their counterparts in the German, British or American navies, they lacked audacity to press home attacks. "Ship and Related Targets, Japanese Submarine Operations", Naval Staff History, Vol. I., section 65, pp. 77-78.



relied upon to neutralize the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean to some extent, and to maintain command of the Western end of that sea. They did stress however, that some if not all British possessions might be under siege, and that British forces might be hard-pressed to maintain their position in Egypt. Such a situation would not be as serious as the surrender of British sea power in the Far East. "This situation", stated the C.O.S., "demands the recognition of the principle that no anxieties or risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East."\*

The scenario that was described, with its clearly-stated policy of sending the fleet to the Far East, was one which the British were soon to regret. The Pacific Dominions accepted the words of the C.O.S., and based their defence preparations on them. Their willingness in 1939 to send their best to fight in the Western Desert was contingent on their conviction that should Japan attack, Britain would come to their aid. This was the unwritten quid pro quo of Imperial relations and Imperial defence. Any undermining of it, any doubts or suspicions held by the Dominions that British promises would not be backed up by British actions, might well lead to the end of Dominion co-operation in war, and the possible break-up of the Commonwealth. There is little doubt that this more than anything else promoted the C.O.S., Hankey, and successive British governments to agree in the first instance and to subsequent reiteration of this commitment to the Pacific Dominions.

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\* Italics - C.O.S.





When the C.O.S. summed up, they stated that the military liabilities of the British Commonwealth of Nations were:

Security of our Imperial Communications throughout the world;  
Security of the United Kingdom against German aggression;  
Security of Empire interests in the Far East against Japanese aggression;  
Security of interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East;  
Security of India against Soviet aggression.

They ended by alluding to the rearmament programme, which had been initiated primarily as an insurance against the dangers inherent in the present policy of Germany, and to provide for an adequate fleet to meet British liabilities in the Far East.

What course would a war with Japan take? The C.O.S. had their views on this too.<sup>31</sup> "We consider" they said, "that more than one European nation might regard a war between Japan and ourselves or its aftermath as a favourable opportunity to attack our interests elsewhere." Having said that, they postulated various contingencies that had to be anticipated.\* One of these would occur when Britain and France were already at war with Germany, and the Japanese entered the war. In this situation, the C.O.S. felt that the strength of the fleet to be sent to the Far East could only be decided in the light of

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\* The C.O.S. stated that in respect to relative strength of the I.J.N. and R.N. in the Far East, where the R.N. might be inferior in ships, but "we can, however, regard our fleet, even when inferior in numbers by one heavy ship, as at least equivalent in fighting value to the Japanese Fleet . " C.O.S., 595, 6/6/37, Cab. 53/32.



conditions at that time. There were two situations that the Admiralty might have to face: the first was, war occurring at a time when British naval forces had been fully deployed and German naval forces were on the defensive, held back in the Baltic and North Sea. A less manageable situation was, when British naval resources had been fully deployed and the German Fleet had broken out to range the trade routes in the Atlantic and possibly elsewhere. The number of variables that the Admiralty might have to cope with implied that they could not plan for war on hard and fast lines.

One such variable was the degree of dispersion of the fleet on convoy duties in the Atlantic,\* and assisting in the protection of cover, French convoys in the Mediterranean. In these circumstances, a long period must elapse before any redistribution of forces would permit a fleet being despatched to the Far East.

One fact, however, clearly emerges from the above considerations. From the naval point of view alone, the period of 70 days at present allowed for the arrival of the fleet at Singapore after the outbreak of war with Japan can no longer be considered as a maximum.

To the Dominion representatives reading the report, it should have been obvious that promise of a fleet proceeding East of Suez had been considerably compromised and that the 40 days previously envisaged had now obviously increased.

The difficulties and dangers of a two-ocean war to the security of the British Empire were clearly so great that the C.O.S. could only recommend in the strongest terms that "no effort must be spared to establish such good relations with our former allies, the Japanese, as will obviate as far as

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\* The C.O.S., on Admiralty advice, discounted the capability of submarine attack due to A.S.D.I.C.





possible, the chances of their being aligned against us".

The reports of the C.O.S. were greeted with some discomfort by the Pacific Dominions, and it was not unexpected that both the Australians and New Zealanders wished clarification of the issues raised by this important Review of Imperial Defence.<sup>32</sup> Towards the end of the Conference, both Dominions submitted lengthy questionnaires which probed British Far Eastern naval policy. The Australian questionnaire was divided into several sections: the first dealt with British strategic policy and Anglo-Japanese relations. The Australians wished to ascertain if H.M.G. was pursuing a policy of rapprochement with Japan, and, as an adjunct, if Britain took a firm stand with Japan, could the Americans be counted on for any support? In the answer to this, the British stated that they hoped for permanent friendship with Japan; and in the case of the latter contingency, the C.O.S. did not believe that the United States could be relied upon.

In the event of a two-ocean war, the C.O.S. repeated their contention that,

Once war with Japan has broken out, our policy must be governed by the consideration that, until the issue with Germany has been settled, we cannot count on being able to support anything more than a defensive policy in the Far East. Economic pressure would remain the essential feature of this policy, but owing to the heavier demands on our naval forces, its action is bound to be slower.

The intervention of Italy, would, the C.O.S. noted, impose conflicting demands on the Royal Navy; but they again emphasized in such a situation, British policy must be governed by the principle that "no anxieties or risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East.



As for the Japanese invasion of Australia, the C.O.S. felt that this was not a feasible operation of war. The distances involved were too great, and the Japanese could not establish air superiority with ship-borne aircraft against land-based aircraft in so large a country as Australia. More important, as long as the British position at Singapore was secure, and as long as the Navy was sufficiently strong to allow for a force to be sent east, capable of containing the Japanese Fleet, an assault on Australia was highly unlikely.

Certainly the answers to the Australians did not contain anything that had not been said before. If the C.O.S. were somewhat ambiguous in terms of Italian intervention or the strength and time of dispatch of the fleet to the Far East, they were specific enough in claiming that the Japanese were highly unlikely to attack Australia in force: a belief that had been held for many years by all those who examined this possibility in London. Far more important was the priority accorded to the Far East over British interests in the Mediterranean. This priority was to assume great importance both in application and interpretation once war did break out.

The New Zealanders, always more practical, were more specific in their questionnaire.<sup>33</sup> They wanted to know why it was not possible for the U.K. to maintain a fleet in the Far East in peace time.

If for various reasons this was not possible, the New Zealand Government wanted a positive statement that a British fleet of sufficient strength would move to the Far East in the event that Japan had taken offensive action, even if Britain was also embroiled in Europe.\* More pertinent, the New

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\* Italics - author's





Zealanders expressed doubts about the capabilities of the Navy to operate in the face of air attack; and they were inclined to the view that their local defence was better achieved by air - than by surface ships. In a somewhat laconic manner, the New Zealand Government said it would be glad to receive an up-to-date view of this problem.

These indeed were hard, practical questions. They required some equally hard answers from the British. The C.O.S. stated that the basic principle of Empire naval policy was to maintain, under conditions of maximum economy, sufficient naval forces to operate in any part of the world where control of sea communications might be threatened. This principle, the C.O.S. claimed, was not compatible with the permanent retention in times of peace of naval forces in all areas where threats might arise. Maintaining sufficient naval forces at Singapore to meet the Japanese Fleet in peace time, had the following disadvantages: the contingency of war with Japan was not likely unless and until Britain was at war in Europe; and the presence of a strong British fleet in European waters in normal times was a strong factor for the preservation of peace. If a large fleet were stationed in the Far East in peace time, maintenance costs would be greatly increased on account of the need for duplication at Singapore of the numerous facilities upon which the Navy depended. Furthermore, an unduly high proportion of foreign to home service for the personnel of the Royal Navy would result, which could only be rectified by an uneconomical increase in the total numbers borne by the Navy. Finally, the C.O.S. suggested that political considerations, particularly regarding British relations with Japan, might well preclude the stationing of a major portion of the fleet in the Far East at present. It might antagonize the





Japanese. But if Japan attacked when Britain was at war in Europe, it would not detract from the accepted Far Eastern strategic policy - the dispatch of a fleet to Singapore as soon as possible after the outbreak of hostilities with Japan. British naval strength did not permit her to satisfy this requirement until 1939, but by then, Britain's new standard of naval strength would allow the placement of a fleet in the Far East fully adequate to meet the requirements as outlined during the Conference.

Though the withdrawal for modernization of three heavy ships introduced an element of weakness into the situation, especially from early 1938 to mid-1939, the C.O.S. believed that "we can regard our Far Eastern fleet as at least equivalent in fighting value to the Japanese" and "at no time up to 1940 will Britain be unable to send a fleet to the Far East".\* In addressing themselves to the scale of attack likely to be mounted against New Zealand, the C.O.S. pointed out that it would

be decided on the outcome of the struggle between the British Commonwealth and Japan and for the control of sea communications. In a Far Eastern war, even the Commonwealth of Australia - the Dominion nearest Japan, is still so far distant that no Japanese Government would face the responsibility of committing a large expeditionary force to service against Australia unless the command of the sea-line of communication was assured for a sufficient period to enable the object to be achieved."

The same assessment applied to New Zealand, which was situated even further from Japan than Australia.

Concerning the role of aircraft, the C.O.S. made this comment:

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\* Italics - author's



The investigation which was recently held, and to which we presume the Government of New Zealand refers, related only to the attack and defence of capital ships. Generally, the capability of surface warships to operate in the face of an air attack is one on which no agreed assessment has yet been made. It is possible that only war experience will decide this issue. As regards local defence; surface ships, aircraft, coast defences and supporting troops must all play their part.

Thus the C.O.S. recommended that the New Zealand Government continue with its traditional defence policy of placing its effort on warships - a policy they had already suggested in answering previous New Zealand questions concerning this matter.<sup>34</sup>

In the answers to both questionnaires and in their original appreciations of the Far Eastern situation and general naval policy, the reader will have noticed a rather important emphasis on the type of fleet that could be dispatched to the Far East at different times and the stress on capital ships. In all the reports mentioned, this was the basic calculation of naval strength. Aircraft carriers were seen only as an adjunct, not as a prime unit of fleet strength. In fact, there was more concern about cruisers than about aircraft carriers.

No sooner had the Imperial Conference ended than the assumption that Italy could be excluded from British defence calculations was raised at the 296th meeting of the C.I.D.<sup>35</sup> Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence\*,

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\* As Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, he acted as Deputy for P.M. on C.I.D. D.P.(R) Committee, C.O.S. and Principal Supply Officers Committee.





stated that Italy might well be an enemy, particularly if she were to gain German support. The Prime Minister, Chamberlain, dissented. If Germany were at war with Britain, there would be "no doubt Italy would fish in troubled waters". The ideal in defence preparations was in fact to be ready against Italy, Japan and Germany; but this was impossible. There were limits to British resources, and British defence and foreign policy had to be correlated. It was fundamental "that we did not quarrel with Germany". If this was possible to achieve, Britain need not fear Italy. Germany was still the greatest potential danger and the "first priority is to make defence preparations against that country". Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, pointed out that the C.O.S. paper 450-C, given to the Australian delegation at the Imperial Conference, stated categorically that "no anxieties or risks to our interests in the Mediterranean should be allowed to interfere with the dispatch of our fleet to the Far East". Chamberlain noted this, and agreed that Italy could not be considered a friend, and should possibly be omitted from the Cabinet decision of November 1933 regarding potential enemies; but, he added, a final decision would be taken on the receipt of the review by the C.O.S. of the Mediterranean and Middle East situations.

Shortly thereafter, on July 14, 1937, the Cabinet accepted the recommendation of the C.I.D. that Italy no longer be considered a "friendly power".

The warm summer of 1937 in Europe was small compensation for the Democracies. Everywhere their fortunes were in decline. In Spain, the Fascists were receiving unstinting material aid and support from the Germans and Italians. In Africa, Italy had consummated her conquest of Ethiopia. In France, there



was little unity in the face of danger. Across the Pacific, the Japanese were to commence war on China in August. In London, the growing threats in the three vital areas of British interests - the Mediterranean, home waters, and the Far East, led the Government to play for time. "I believe", wrote Chamberlain, "that the double policy of rearmament and better relations with Germany and Italy will carry us safely through the danger period."<sup>36</sup>

Yet in fact, the desperate circumstances did not lead to desperate measures. British rearmament was still a leisurely affair, while appeasement became not a means, but an end of policy.



FOOTNOTES

1. Australia Debates, 1925, Vol. 110, Col. 99, 1926, Vol. 114, Col. 5454. See also "Australia and Pacific Relations", R.T. Vol. 18, pp. 397-98.
2. M.S. Wigmore, "The Japanese Thrust", Australia in the War 1939-45, Canberra, 1957, pp. 7-8. Also G.H. Gill, "The Royal Australian Navy, 1939-45", Australia in the War 1939-45, Canberra, 1957. p. 15. This was a view that was held by the Australian General Staff.
3. Speech to R.U.S.I., 29/10/30.
4. Hankey to Lord President, 29/6/34, Cab. 21/434.
5. The telegrams to the Governor Generals of Australia and New Zealand, sent on June 8, informing their respective governments that the British Cabinet had approved of the Conference, stressed that there was not to be any public announcement, and that the Conference would have to be held at Singapore as the C in C China could not leave his station. Cables to G.G. Australia and New Zealand 9650/1 8/6/33 in Adm. 116/1321.
6. Adm. M00 507/33 9/5/33, Adm. 116/1321. The talks were based on the Admiralty's Far East war memorandum M00469 - modified by Adm. letter M00505/33 26/4/33 Adm. 116/4361.
7. The worry about provoking Japan was again discussed in relation to increasing the Garrison at Singapore by 4,000 troops. The War Office wanted to ask Australia or New Zealand for the troops. The D.C.N.S., D.M.O. and D.N.I. discussed this on March 3, 1934, as did the C.O.S. report on the Singapore Garrison. C.O.S. 305 Cab. 53/23, and concluded that "political factors cannot be ignored ... In the present situation in the Far East, which at the present moment shows signs of becoming less tense." Adm. M00 1023/34 14/3/34, Adm. 116/3121. C.O.S. 130th meeting 27/6/34, Cab. 53/4 stated that there would be troops available.





8. Adm. Conference 1934 on H.M.S. Kent, 29/1/34, Adm. 116/1321. Also W.O. to Adm. D.P., 15/11/34, and 18/11/1321, file M00507/33, Adm. 116/33. Also Adm. letter 27/10/33, M00519/33, Adm. 116/33, and D.P. 6/12/33, M003569/33, Adm. 116/1321, as well J.P. (93) 24/11/33, Cab. 55/6
9. Adm. M00712/34, 25/6/34, Adm. 116/134, and 15/3/34, Adm. 116/134.
10. Report C in C China, 5/2/34, Adm. File 116/3121.
11. D.R.C. 14, and C.P. 64(34), Op. Cit.
12. D.C. (M), 32 (120), Op. Cit.
13. Hankey to Lord President 30/7/34, Cab. 21/293.
14. Initialed S.B., 30/7/34 and sent to representatives of Service Departments that dealt with Dominion Problems, Col. J. Hutton, W.O. Capt. J.H. Godfrey, Adm. Sqn. Ldr. G.I. Gibbs, A.M., Cab. 21/293.
15. See Debates on Australian Defence - quoted in Cab. 21/297.
16. Meeting Defence Committee (Australia) 5/11/34, in Cab. 21/297.
17. C.I.D. 1181-B, Cab. 4/23, and C.O.S. 372, Cab. 43/29.
18. The C.I.G.S. had sent a note to Bruce the High Commissioner, that the scale of attack on Australia that operated C.I.D. 372-C of 30/8/32 - that only sporadic raids would be made on Australia. C.I.G.S. to Bruce 15/2/34, Cab. 21/297.
19. Memo by C.G.S. in Hankey's Report, 5/3/35, Cab. 21/297.
20. Critique of Hankey's Report, 19/3/35, Cab. 21/297.
21. See Parkill to Hankey, 16/8/35. Also various Australian newspaper reports, Melbourne Age (Labour) and Sydney Morning Herald and Australian debates all in Cab. 21/397.
22. The Australian General Staff were not the only ones who



22. (continued)

questioned the East of Suez concept. Smuts raised the point with the C in C Africa Stn. V/Adm. Sir Edward Evans that "They (the South African Government) will not accept the C.I.D.'s assessment of the probable scale of attack on Union ports in Eastern war. Their view is that with present world unrest, there can be no guarantee that the British main fleet can arrive in time to prevent the fall of Singapore; consequently provision must be made for establishing of temporary base in South Africa, both for Imperial and protection of South African interests. Capetown's obvious position especially as improved dry docks, fuel storage" Cable C in C Afr. to Adm. No. 744, 11/4/35, Cab. 36/8. The South Africans for the first time in many years showed some interest in Imperial defence. They wanted the British to provide free a 15" gun. The issue was battled back and forth and little came of it. See various cables to and from C in C Aff. to Adm., and Hankey to Smuts, and Adm. to D in C, during April, May 1935, in Cab. 36/8.

23. C.O.S. 461, and 91st meeting 27/4/36, Cab. 55/7.

24. G.G.N.Z. to S.S. Doms. 1/6/36. Cab. 55/8.

25. S.S.D. to G.G.N.Z. 10/6/36, Cab. 55/8. Also see J.P. 101, 16/6/36, Cab. 55/19.

26. C.I.D. 288th meeting, 11/2/37, Cab. 2/6.

27. In the first draft of the C.O.S. report, the Chiefs had made a caustic remark that rearmament was being expanded and accelerated "in so far as compatible with the strict financial limitations entailed by orthodox financial policy will allow". Chatfield, speaking for the C.O.S., agreed that the comments on financial policy were "unfortunately worded and would be altered"; C.I.S. 288th meeting, Op. Cit. Amended C.I.D. 289th meeting, 25/2/37, Cab. 2/6.

28. C.O.S. 560 22/2/37, Cab. 53/30. Also C.I.D. 1307-S-B 25/2/37, Cab. 4/25 and Cab. 32/127.

29. Unfortunately for the British, the Dutch were a small power possessing limited strength, yet those colonial possessions had great strategic value in respect to Singapore. This had long been recognized by the C.O.S.





29. (continued)  
and the C.I.D., but there was little the British could or were willing to do to give material assistance or to agree to any definite commitments. C.I.D. 1256-B 27/7/36, Cab. 4/24, C.I.D. 281st meeting Cab. 2/6 and Cab. 52 (36).
30. In 1937 and 1938, the Dutch approached the British concerning the defence of the Dutch East Indies and informal talks were held in London and at Singapore. The British gave technical advice, but stressed that they could not undertake any commitments. Nor were they willing to tell the Dutch that the integrity of the D.E.I.S. was a major British concern. See C.I.D. 1380-B, 22/12/37, Cab. 4/27. Also C.I.D. 1385-B, Cab. 4/27 and C.I.D. 280th meeting, Cab. 2/6. While the problem of the Netherlands East Indies was a constant source of concern to the British, it did not have any effect on basic naval policy as it pertained to the Far East.
31. C.O.S. 596 also D.P. (P) 5, 14/6/37, Cab. 16/182. The C.O.S. report was a composite document which was based on input from the J.P.S.C., C.O.S. 579 (J.P.), 7/5/37, Cab. 55/9 and also Naval Appendix, C.O.S. 570, 24/3/37, Cab. 4/26.
32. C.O.S. 595, 6/6/37, Cab. 53/32.
33. C.O.S. 594, 4/6/37, 53/32.
34. C.O.S. 478, (J.P.) 20/6/36, Cab. 64/28.
35. C.I.D. 296th meeting, 5/7/37, Cab. 2/6.
36. Feiling, Op. Cit., p. 319.



CHAPTER VI

NAVAL POWER, DIPLOMACY AND REARMAMENT, 1937-39

Possibly Chamberlain's optimism was founded on the fact that the year he became Prime Minister, 1937, the European situation appeared calmer, with only the war in Spain exacerbating European relations. But the Chiefs of Staff had little doubt that war was coming. When and under what circumstances were the open questions. Even Chamberlain expressed his doubts about the international situation in the privacy of his diary, when he wrote that<sup>1</sup> . . . "the Japanese are growing more and more insolent and brutal", and in a letter to his stepmother, that the Japanese "pay no heed to reason, but there is one argument to which they will always give attention and that is force".<sup>2</sup>

Any talk of a rapprochement with Japan was ended when the Japanese attacked the Chinese at the Marco Polo Bridge near Peking.<sup>3</sup>

However, as W.R. Louis notes, Britain had no certain policy.<sup>4</sup> Certainly she was not ready to accede to Japanese actions, nor to antagonize the United States by seeming to condone them. Some hope of American support was given by President Roosevelt's "Quarantine Speech" in Chicago of October 5, 1937, which seemed to infer that America might be ready to boycott Japan. All this was discussed at a Cabinet meeting on October 13, when Chamberlain stated that he did not underrate the President's speech as implying that there was a point beyond which the United States would not permit the dictator states to go.<sup>5</sup> But the lessons of the Abyssinian crisis were recalled, and it was agreed that unless the United



States was prepared to join the United Kingdom in imposing sanctions against Japan, they would fail. Furthermore, if they were imposed, Japan, encouraged by Italy and Germany, might go to war. With the unsettled European situation, it was not possible for Britain to send a fleet to the Far East. The Cabinet concluded that sanctions were useless unless the United States would commit themselves along with Britain and other interested nations; and there had to be firm American support should Japan decide for war if sanctions were imposed.

But Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, seriously considered a display of force in the Far East. In September, they decided to examine the consequences of sending at least two capital ships to the Far East.<sup>6</sup> These two capital ships were to cast a long shadow.

In September 1937, the Admiralty was asked their views on the sending of two capital ships to Singapore.<sup>7</sup> The Admiralty were to keep in mind the state of preparedness of the base there, and the effect on British naval strength in other parts of the world. The other assumptions were that the Mediterranean situation would remain as it was, and that the naval problems of the Spanish Civil War would be resolved by the Nyon Conference.<sup>8</sup>

On September 22, the C.N.S., Chatfield, submitted his appraisal.<sup>9</sup> Little would be gained by such an action. The dispatch of the ships in terms of serving "as a deterrent against any Japanese tendency to commit an act of aggression against the British Empire" and "the extent to which the presence of such a force would act as a deterrent, requires careful consideration". Chatfield thought that Japan would make her decision as to war "on the basis of her anticipation of the final outcome of such a war, and not on the initial





naval situation in the Far East." The Japanese would only be concerned about "our ability to dispatch to the Far East a fleet capable of meeting and defeating the Japanese fleet in battle". The proposal to send two capital ships to the Far East would lead to a "division of our limited force of capital ships between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres", and, "far from acting as a deterrent to the Japanese, might even present a temptation to Japan in offering them at least a possibility of defeating the divided British forces in detail". Once, it had been considered policy to station a battle cruiser squadron on Singapore, but political and naval considerations had ended that idea. If any ships were to be sent, then the whole Main Fleet should go.

In his memo, the C.N.S. omitted, on advice from the First Lord any reference to Far Eastern considerations taking priority over the Mediterranean.<sup>10</sup> The basic set of priorities seemed to be wilting away under the pressure of the European situation.

In October 1937, when the idea of sanctions against Japan was being mooted, the J.P.S.C. was asked to prepare a report dealing with a war with Japan, with particular reference to the naval aspects of such a conflict.<sup>11</sup> They were to assume either a war with Japan while Europe was still at peace, but with the R.N. having to retain forces in home waters to neutralize the German Fleet; or Britain already at war with Germany before Japanese aggression occurred.

The J.P.S.C. assumed<sup>12</sup> in the first case, war with Japan alone, that she was unable due to her geographical position to attack British trade and communications as a whole; and that she could not achieve a decisive effect by naval or air attack on trade. But, pending "the arrival of our fleet at Singapore,



Japan will have a predominant naval superiority in the Far East". In summary, the J.P.S.C. believed that aside from raiders, the Japanese capability to undermine the war effort of the British Empire by attacking the trade routes, would be serious but not desperate.

Overall, the J.P.S.C. seemed optimistic concerning British chances in a single-handed war against Japan. In a two-ocean war, the situation was different. The first problem was when the British fleet could move East. This depended on the sea war in home waters, and the year in which war broke out, as British naval strength varied year by year due to ships being laid up for modernization or nearing completion. If Germany should adopt an aggressive naval policy forcing the dispersal of British forces into the Atlantic and to assist the French in the Mediterranean, the concentration of the fleet might take some time to achieve. "Apart from the naval aspect," the J.P.S.C., noted, "the delay which political considerations may impose on the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East cannot be assessed."

The J.P.S.C. concluded that the former assumption that the fleet would arrive at Singapore within 70 days might not hold. Of equal importance was the stress placed by the J.P.S.C. on the inter-relationship between home and Far Eastern waters. As events transpired, the Atlantic was to claim first priority and the demands of that battle were to throw British naval strategy in the Far East into the dustbin of unattainable goals.

The C.O.S. examined the J.P.S.C.'s<sup>13</sup> report and warned that regardless of what assistance Britain could obtain from France, "we cannot foresee the time when our defence forces will be strong enough to safeguard our trade, territory and vital





interests against Germany, Italy and Japan at the same time " It was imperative under the existing circumstances for the Government to attempt by diplomacy, to reduce the "number of potential enemies and to gain support of potential allies".

The Cabinet, having digested Chatfield's and other reports, did nothing further concerning the plans to send out two capital ships to the Far East. Meanwhile, as the Cabinet was discussing the Far Eastern situation, the American Navy's War Plans Division\*, as well as the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William Leahy, were coming to the conclusion that in any war with Japan, the United States would be fighting in concert with the British.

Late in 1937, the American Joint-Planning Committee (J.P.C.) were already working on plans for a war with Japan (known as the Orange Plans) in which co-operation with the British was taken into consideration. Simultaneously, on the suggestion of President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull, in December 1937, Capt. Royal Ingersoll, Chief of the U.S. Navy's W.P.D. was secretly sent to London to meet with Capt. Tom Phillips, his counterpart in the Admiralty. Ingersoll had received his instructions from both Leahy and the President, and was strongly advised that the United States could not make

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\* The War Plans Division (W.P.D.) came under the Chief of Naval Operations (C.N.O.) who corresponded in function to the British First Sea Lord. During this period, the C.N.O. was Adm. William Leahy; the Chief of the War Plans Division was Capt. (later Admiral) Royal Ingersoll. There was also the Joint Planning Committee (J.P.C.), consisting of the Chief of Staff, Chief of G-3 (Operations and Training) and Chief of the W.P.D. as the Army members. The Navy was represented by the C.N.O. Assistant C.N.O. and the Chief of the W.P.D.



any hard and fast commitments concerning American entry into a Far Eastern war.<sup>14</sup>

Ingersoll arrived in London on December 31, 1937.<sup>15</sup> The following day, he met the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, and the Permanent Undersecretary, Alexander Cadogan. Eden was more interested in immediate American support than in long range plans, and asked if the United States would make a naval demonstration in the Pacific, with particular emphasis on the sending of cruisers to Singapore.

In his talks with Chatfield, Ingersoll\* stated that the purpose of the conversations was to exchange information that "would be helpful in making future plans and decisions". Later in the day, when the core of the talks was reached between Phillips and Ingersoll, Phillips informed his American counterpart that there was considerable political pressure being exerted to send naval forces to the Far East in "dribblets", which the Admiralty was against. The Admiralty's position was, if reinforcements were to be sent, the force should be strong enough so that "alone" they could "cope with the Japanese Fleet". Ingersoll was also told that the Fleet was putting together its train and would be ready to move at ten to fifteen days' notice, if mobilization was ordered after January 15, 1938. Phillips stated that the Admiralty wanted to mobilize ten days before

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\* Ingersoll's visit led Eden to press the Americans for a naval demonstration against Japan. Later, on January 7, Chamberlain agreed to a cable to Washington asking if the Americans would take parallel action should the British take further steps in respect to sending the fleet to the Far East (which would require mobilization). Sir Robert Lindsay, the Ambassador in Washington, replied that the U.S.N.'s Pacific Fleet was being prepared for action and that the Pacific maneuvers would be advanced to February from March. Dilks, Op. Cit., pp. 33-34.



sailing, so that the reserve fleet would be ready for a European war. It was the Admiralty's opinion that while the French could hold the Western Mediterranean, Malta and Cyprus "might have to be abandoned". In overall deployment, the British were prepared to cover the line from Singapore, south to the Philippines at least as far east as the New Hebrides; while the U.S.N. would take over the eastern sector of Fiji, Samoa and Hawaii to the Mainland. The Admiralty was interested in Manila as a fleet base, and that as long as the U.S.N. was at Hawaii, and the R.N. at Singapore, Manila was reasonably safe. "The British", reported Ingersoll, "felt that a demonstration by the two fleets, the British at Singapore and the Americans at Hawaii or further west, will be necessary in order to bring about peace terms between Japan and China." In regard to Allies, the British did not expect much from the French except access to French Colonial ports, while the Dutch would be "benevolent, provided they are assured that they will not be let down". Ingersoll was also told that the British could not commit the Dominions, as "they like to maintain their independence". But in their calculations of fleet strength, the Admiralty added in the ships of the Pacific Dominions, "which they definitely assure will be available".

The strength of the fleet that the British could send to the Far East would consist of 8 battleships, 1 battlecruiser, 3 aircraft carriers, 19 cruisers plus various lighter units. On the American side, providing the President declared a national emergency so that the Fleet could be mobilized, the strength of the U.S.N. in the Pacific would consist of 9 battleships, plus one aircraft carrier and supporting cruisers and other ships.





The remainder of the talks concerned exchanges of codes\*, signalling procedures and general information of a technical nature. During the talks held on January 10, Ingersoll stated that "he could not commit the Navy Department, but he believed that the statements he had made would be approved by Admiral Leahy, the C.N.O., or by higher authority if necessary". The only higher authority was in fact the President.

In the Memorandum<sup>16</sup> signed by Phillips and Ingersoll and approved by Chatfield, there were certain paragraphs that laid stress on the extreme difficulties the Royal Navy would face in the event of a two-ocean war. It noted that while the Admiralty were not seriously apprehensive of German submarines, they were worried about the ravages which German surface raiders could inflict upon British seaborne commerce. Should Italy enter the war, at a time when the greater part of the British fleet had been dispatched to the Far East, it would be necessary for the Admiralty to rely on the Cape of Good Hope route to the Far East. It would be left to the French to hold the western Mediterranean while some British forces based on Gibraltar would help secure the event of a general European war, it would be necessary for the Admiralty to reduce British strength in the Far East. Under such circumstances, the possibility of direct tactical co-operation between the American and British fleets would demand

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\* In the course of his talks at the Admiralty, Ingersoll exchanged information with the D.C.N.S., V/Adm. William James, Crd. T.C. Hampton, W.F.D. Capt. P.F. Glover, Signals.



further consideration.\*

While the Ingersoll talks did not produce any immediate overt American support for Britain's position in the Far East, or any tough measures against Japan, it did provide for an "agreed accord" that the waters and ports of the British Commonwealth would be available to the American Fleet, and that U.S. waters and ports would be open to British warships "in the event of the two fleets being required to work together in a war against Japan". The talks were also important as it was the first instance since the First World War that the two navies met to formulate mutual plans in the event of a war, and was the forerunner of the more formal and effective staff conversations that were to take place three years later.<sup>17</sup>

The talks also have to be seen in the wider context of President Roosevelt's ongoing effort to establish a firmer relationship with Britain. His Secretary of State, Hull, had publicly welcomed a speech by Field Marshal Smuts, advocating an association between the British Commonwealth and the United States. In addition, the President had recognized the Soviet regime, and had approved large-scale American naval manoeuvres in the Pacific, and the retention of the American Fleet in those waters after the 1934 exercises. And in a letter carried by Admiral Sir Roger Bayley, and addressed to the King, the President suggested that much would be gained by American-

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\* The day the Memo was signed, Ingersoll was entertained at lunch by Inskip, Cooper, Chatfield, Cadogan and V/Adm. James. As Ingersoll noted: "The make-up of the British party may be an indication of the importance which the British attach to the conversations, which Chatfield stated were most helpful to them (the British) in obtaining a better understanding of what the mutual problem would be if war developed."





British naval co-operation to preserve world peace. A further indication of the President's attitude can be gleaned by the visit of the 6" cruisers Trenton, Memphis and Milwaukee to Sydney to take part in the opening ceremonies of the Singapore naval base on February 14, 1938.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever naval action Britain might have taken in the Pacific, European problems prevented the dispatch of any British ships to the Far East. The problem was Italy. As Cadogan noted: "the situation created by ... a hostile Italy in friendly relations with Japan and astride our Mediterranean communications will inevitably react on our freedom in the Far East".<sup>19</sup>

It was Chamberlain's desire to neutralize, by diplomacy, the Italian problem. His trump card was the Royal Navy's presence in the Mediterranean and home waters. Thus, when the decision came to be made concerning the despatch of two capital ships to the East, Chamberlain kept them home.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, there was no American guarantee that if Britain became involved in a Far Eastern war, she would have the immediate full-fledged backing of the United States. Without this guarantee all Britain could do was to follow in the wake of American policy and try "to reduce potential enemies".

The crucial question of allies was raised by Eden after he had read the C.O.S. report of October 1937.<sup>21</sup> He took strong exception to the tone of appeasement expressed by the C.O.S. To Eden, there was but one crucial ally: "to go further, it must be our constant aim in peacetime to increase as far as possible the likelihood of the United States giving us armed support in the case of war".<sup>22</sup> But there was another potential



ally closer at hand - France. The importance of the French Fleet in British naval planning, had continuously been noted by the C.O.S. Now, with the European and Far Eastern situation coming to the boil, the French made tentative approaches to the British to open naval staff conversations.

The C.O.S. reviewing the suggestions from the Foreign Office for Anglo-French staff talks,<sup>23</sup> appeared to have lost all sense of reality.<sup>24</sup> They feared that the term "staff conversations" contained a "sinister purport" and implied military co-operation. Hiding behind the Cabinet decision of December 22, 1937 not to send an expeditionary force, they insisted that the British had little to offer the French in exchange for their naval co-operation. They accepted that the R.A.F. needed French air-fields to strike at Germany, but they still did not advocate staff conversations, on the grounds that the French would leak them to the Germans, which would hinder "our present efforts to reach a détente with Germany". Referring to naval conversations suggested by the French Ambassador, the C.O.S. admitted that the French Fleet would be required to help support the British in the Atlantic, home and Mediterranean areas, should the British Fleet be sent to the Far East; but they also believed that staff conversations "were not necessary to secure this co-operation". They concluded that the idea of staff talks "should not be entertained" but were willing to exchange information at the Attaché level.\*

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\* This summary was composed by Newall, C.A.S., Chatfield, and Field-Marshal Viscount Gort, C.I.G.S.



It had become apparent that British weakness, coupled with the policy of limited liability, had produced a situation where the one relatively sure ally, France, could not count on British support where it mattered - on the ground. Britain's naval policy in the Far East was losing its credibility due to the lack of an army.<sup>25</sup> It could also be argued that this lack could bring in its wake the collapse of France, after which the control of the waters around Britain would pass into German hands. If that occurred, every available naval resource Britain possessed would be required to hold home waters and to guard against invasion. There would be nothing to spare for any ventures against Japan.

1938 opened with events in Europe and the Far East moving from one crisis to another. Hitler, having consolidated his power by a ruthless purge, started to look further afield and began to bully Austria. Italy and Germany were equally active in Spain, violating every agreement concerning non-intervention; while in the Far East, Japan was establishing puppet régimes within their seized territories.

With tension building up, the C.O.S. were asked to prepare yet another appreciation of the situation if war broke out with Germany in April 1938.<sup>26</sup> They answered promptly, as might have been expected, that "war against Japan, Germany and Italy simultaneously in 1938 is a commitment which neither the present nor projected strength of our defence-forces is designed to meet." Only if the United States entered the war as an ally, would that strain be "considerably reduced".

The C.O.S. emphasis that the British Empire was unprepared for a World War had a great impact on British diplomacy in all quarters. Chamberlain and the C.O.S. saw appeasement as the





only way to avoid disaster.

In March 1938, Hitler made further demands for concessions in Eastern Europe. Chamberlain again asked the C.O.S. for their views on a war with Germany. They replied with another dismal account of British weakness, and again stressed that if Italy and Japan entered the war, the British Empire would be "faced with the gravest danger", for the forces ranged against the Empire would be stronger than anything ever planned for. They set it out squarely:<sup>27</sup>

The British Fleet, seriously reduced in strength by the fact that 3 of our capital ships are now undergoing reconstruction, would have to be redispensed so as to maintain sufficient force to meet the German Fleet in home waters, while a Battle Fleet would be sent to the Far East, where we should stand on the defensive.

We could not, in these circumstances, maintain a sufficient fleet in the Mediterranean, and the Italians would therefore enjoy undisputed control of the Eastern Mediterranean. Our position in the Middle East would become critical.

In these circumstances, the dispatch of a British fleet to Singapore would be imperative and the position in the Mediterranean would depend on French naval action to contain the Italian Fleet.

The outcome of the war would depend on British ability to hold on to key positions, and upon other powers, particularly the United States of America, coming to their aid.

The German threat now convinced the British to agree to staff talks with the French. At a meeting of the C.I.D. in early April 1938,<sup>28</sup> Chatfield presented the naval problem. He strongly advocated that the implications of the Japanese coming into the war "should be clearly put before the French". Chamberlain suggested that Britain had to take account of potential friends as well as enemies. He was not convinced



that Japan was a certain enemy, but even if she were, the attitude of Russia and America had to be taken into account. The principle reason, in his view, for extending the talks to the Mediterranean was possible trouble with Japan; and Japan, "sprawled over China", was in no condition to promote trouble for the British Empire. The C.I.D. agreed that Anglo-French naval conversations should not be held. It was feared that Germany, if she heard about such naval talks, might end the Anglo-German naval agreements of 1935 and 1937. The C.I.D. also asked the C.O.S. to prepare yet again an appreciation of the situation that would arise in the event of a war with Germany in April 1939.

As a document,<sup>29</sup> it differed little in substance or in tone from all the previous appreciations. Britain's enemies were too strong, Britain and her allies too weak. The margin of heavy ships was narrow in the extreme, and the balance of British naval forces could not maintain control of the Mediterranean. In that area, much would hinge on what the French would do. But Imperial commitments demanded that in a World War, the Eastern Mediterranean would have to be sacrificed for the Far East, for Britain had "promised the Dominion Prime Ministers that in the event of a war with Japan, we shall send an adequate fleet to the Far East, irrespective of the situation elsewhere". The Pacific Dominions relied on that promise for their security.

In strategic terms, the C.O.S. maintained, as always, that as long as Singapore held out, they had little anxiety about a war with Japan. The Japanese were likeliest to enter a war at the moment when the British Navy was embroiled in Europe, thus gaining time to launch an attack on Singapore. But such





an attack would still be risky, as long as the Japanese realized that the Royal Navy would arrive in force at some stage before their attack was successfully concluded.

The C.O.S. appreciation was continually revised to meet the deteriorating situation in Europe.<sup>30</sup> But the advice they tendered the Cabinet on September 27, 1938, when the Czechoslovakian crisis was approaching its critical point and the Fleet had been mobilized,<sup>31</sup> was the same as that of the previous July. It was restated in a more formal manner when they submitted their final report on October 4, 1938.<sup>32</sup> Soon after the Czechoslovakian crisis of September, the Admiralty Planning Staff drew up a memorandum on what British naval strength would be on December 31, 1942.<sup>33</sup> This noted that the old capital ships of the R Class were not yet modernized. This imposed considerable tactical and strategical limitations on any fleet of which they formed a part, due to their low endurance and speed. These ships were needed simply as a margin of safety, while other ships were laid up for refit or sent to support convoy escort forces. Overall, Britain was not maintaining the general equilibrium of naval armaments as normally maintained in the past. In a war with Japan, the Royal Navy would face eight Japanese capital ships. If the naval programme now proposed by the Admiralty was completed, then by 1942 Britain would have 9 new ships and one old one to the Far East, leaving 9 to cope with the German Fleet - a margin which was slim indeed.

The succession of crises had meanwhile changed the collective minds of the C.O.S. in respect to Anglo-French conversations. In late May 1938 <sup>34</sup> they had brought to the C.I.D.'s attention the fact that the R.N.'s dispositions had been based on a war in the Mediterranean or in the Far East.



Now, the problem had changed dramatically, for in a war with Germany, it had been assumed Japan and Italy would be neutral. This no longer applied. Now, if a European war occurred, the Battle Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean would have to be recalled to home waters. It was not surprising that the C.O.S. wished staff talks with the French to begin as soon as possible.

On June 2 1938<sup>35</sup> these C.O.S. opinions were discussed by the C.I.D. Chatfield explained that since the situation had changed, time was needed to shift the Fleet from one theatre to another. In order to deal with the three Deutschlands, British battle cruisers must be moved to home waters, while other units presently at home would have to be sent to replace these battle cruisers. All this demanded co-operation from the French.<sup>36</sup>

The C.I.D. therefore agreed to allow naval staff talks to take place with the French,<sup>37</sup> but only on the basis that no commitments were entered into.<sup>38</sup> The British clearly were not ready to go very far. How far would the French go? Whether they would agree to the British Fleet moving East was yet unknown. The answer to this question would throw into sharp relief the global-Imperial view, as opposed to the continental, European outlook of strategy.

And Imperial considerations still took a high priority. No matter how blackly the C.O.S. painted the picture, there was one issue on which they were at one: the importance of Singapore. They continued to insist that "it always had been accepted that the security of the United Kingdom and the security of Singapore, would be the keystones on which the



survival of the British Commonwealth of Nations would depend".<sup>39</sup>

Less than two weeks after the Munich agreement, the Japanese launched their armies into Southern China on October 12, 1938. In the course of a fast campaign, they seized Canton and Hankow, gaining control of China's coast-line and cutting off Hong Kong from the mainland. On November 7, Prince Konoye, the Japanese Prime Minister, proclaimed the establishment of a New Order in East Asia, and intimated that other Powers would have to adjust to it.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly before the attack on China, conversations between the Japanese Army Staff and the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop centred on the strengthening of German-Japanese co-operation against the Soviet Union. Soon these talks were extended to include Italy, and to lay the groundwork for the Tripartite Pact of Steel between the three totalitarian powers. With these events in mind, the British Ambassador to Siam, Sir Josiah Crosby, in a series of dispatches to London,<sup>41</sup> stated that there was an urgent need for a British display of force in the Far East.<sup>42</sup> It was necessary

"to recover a measure of that prestige which we have been losing in Siam by comparison with our more blatant and brutally forceful opponents... What is wanted is a very considerable manifestation of force in the shape of a squadron of battleships and cruisers, as large and as numerous as can be spared from European waters. It would be sufficient if it came no nearer than Singapore, provided that it was powerful enough to give the desired implication of the extent of the British naval might."

The Siamese were asking "whether Britain and France, without the help of the United States, can hope to resist successfully the enemies by whom they are threatened". The sending of a battlecruiser squadron to Singapore would "be enough, as an indication of the sort of fleet which we would quickly dispatch to the Far East in an emergency".





Crosby's letters and dispatches were passed to the Admiralty. A covering note with them suggested that there "was much to be said for this idea, more especially if it were possible to persuade the Americans to make a parallel move".<sup>43</sup> The dispatches were also sent to various British officials in the Far East, including the British Ambassador in Japan since 1937, Sir Robert Craigie. Sir Robert himself had been thinking out Anglo-Japanese policy. He sent a long, well-reasoned dispatch to London, on December 2, 1938.<sup>44</sup> He argued for some form of conciliation towards Japan, in the hope of detaching her from totalitarian powers. His proposals, as W.R. Louis puts it,<sup>45</sup> were that Britain should either fish with Japan or cut bait with China. If conciliation was not feasible, Craigie suggested that Britain should assume a more forceful China policy, and make a determined effort to aid the Chinese in their fight against Japan. But the Foreign Office, particularly Sir John Brenan and Sir William Strang (now Assistant Undersecretary), decided that it would be unwise to make any deals with Japan.<sup>46</sup>

In the interim, the Admiralty had received the gist of Crosby's dispatch,<sup>47</sup> and had rejected his suggestion as "clearly impracticable". This view was supported by the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse.<sup>48</sup>

Crosby was told informally of the Admiralty's decision that there were no capital ships to spare for the Far East. Informally, he was told that the British Ambassador to Japan, Sir Robert Craigie, had taken up his suggestion, as had Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, British Ambassador to China. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, (who had replaced Eden in February 1938) and Nigel Ronald (First Secretary at the Foreign Office) said that the issue would be taken up again with the Admiralty, "slightly



modified ... it is true, and we shall return to the charge with the powers that be."<sup>49</sup>

Craigie himself knew that the chances of co-operation with Japan were slim, considering Japan's unequivocal stance in China. He also knew that Britain could not tread an appeasement road with Japan for fear of alienating the Americans, who were beginning to figure strongly in all British strategic calculations in the Far East.<sup>50</sup> So when he received a copy of Crosby's dispatch, he immediately sent his own views concerning a British naval presence in the Far East to the Foreign Office.<sup>51</sup>

He pointed out that British influence in Japan was contingent on a British naval presence in the Far East. He recognized that in view of the European situation, it was difficult to send a battlecruiser squadron to the Far East, but if Britain wanted to maintain any prestige and influence in that part of the world, she would have to make her naval presence known. The basis of the British Empire required that the defence of the periphery was as important as the defence at the centre. He further stressed that it was important to convince the Americans, who appeared to be taking a strong line towards Japan, that Britain was prepared to defend her Far Eastern interests. So, the dispatch of even one or two battlecruisers to the Far East would have an encouraging effect in the United States, and would demonstrate to the isolationists that Britain was not asking the United States to defend British Far Eastern interests. In conclusion, Craigie brought out the naval strategy which the Admiralty had been propounding since 1922, that the presence of a battlecruiser squadron at Singapore would mean that a large part, if not the whole, of the Japanese battle fleet would be required to escort the convoy proceeding to attack the base at Singapore.





However, as Craigie noted, the Japanese could never be certain that the Americans would not enter the war, and thus they would be unwilling to expose their flank to a possible attack by the American Fleet moving from Hawaii.

This was one of the clearest expositions of the British dilemma, and the relationship between diplomacy and the visible means to exercise power. It was no understatement on Craigie's part that British naval power in the Far East was the major if not the only high-profile symbol of that power. It was a symbol that had been lacking for many years.

On January 21, 1939, the Admiralty received a memo from the Foreign Office composed by its legal expert, C.G. Fitzmaurice. This, based on Craigie's dispatch outlined the relationship between naval strength and British Foreign Policy in the Far East.<sup>52</sup>

The memo repeated what the C.O.S. had said so many times: that in the event of war, the Far East would take precedence over the Eastern Mediterranean. Taking this as policy, it appeared that two views prevailed. The orthodox argument went thus :

The British battle fleet should in principle be kept in Europe and not be divided in time of Peace. Provided the necessary bases exist abroad to which it can be sent and from which it can operate, the Fleet can go anywhere in the world. In these circumstances, it constitutes a latent threat everywhere, while the risk of individual squadrons being overwhelmed piecemeal is avoided. The reply of the Far Eastern school to these arguments would be that they only held good at a time when we had no serious enemy outside Europe. It was then the case that our position could be fully maintained by concentrating our main forces in Europe: so long as the potential enemy was contained there, he was in effect contained all the world over.



But conditions had changed, and the centralization school of thought no longer held good, for the very threat of a two-ocean war gave added cause to make British defences in the Far East self-sustaining.

The counterargument was as follows. There were only so many capital ships available. If to dispatch a fleet to the Far East would so denude home waters as to leave insufficient strength to cope with the German Navy, "it seems to go ... beyond the question whether capital ships should be permanently stationed in the Far East... It affects our whole present capacity to send a fleet to the Far East at all", unless a simultaneous war with Germany could be eliminated.

But leaving that question aside, there was the real problem whether British public opinion would allow the dispatch of a major part of the Fleet to the Far East while Britain was at war with Germany. There was also the question of time. It was possible the Royal Navy could not use the Suez route. Delays due to gathering a fleet train, and to fueling and weather, might so hinder the fleet's departure and alter its time of arrival, that Singapore would have fallen. Therefore, "is it really safe," Fitzmaurice asked, "to stake everything on the capacity of Singapore to resist?". And he added,

the argument that we have not enough ships to station in the Far East really involved as a corollary that we have not enough ships to send there if emergency arises, and this involves the further corollary that we cannot really defend the Far East at all, insofar as its defence depends upon capital ships. On this showing, the construction of the necessary number of vessels would become an imperative necessity if the Far East is to be defended.

It did not take long for the Admiralty to refute this Foreign Office document. In doing so, it made clear that the



decision to send a fleet to the Far East, long accepted as policy was not as irrevocable as it seemed.

The C.N.S., Sir Roger Backhouse, made some comments on the thinking of Craigie.<sup>53</sup> He noted that the policy of sending a fleet East had been outlined to the Dominion Prime Ministers by Sir Samuel Hoare on May 26, 1937. But to station a fleet in the Far East during peacetime was something else. The fleet just was not of sufficient strength to send any units east of Suez.<sup>54</sup> Backhouse also stressed the importance of the United States as a potential "friend", and he hoped that the Americans would lend to the British support of their fleet by its presence in the Pacific.

Presented with the Fitzmaurice memorandum, Backhouse told the First Lord, Lord Stanhope,<sup>55</sup> that it was indeed most desirable to send some ships to the Far East, but the Admiralty could only fully man eleven of their capital ships now in service, and he added, "I have no use for Fitzmaurice's suggestion to send out the five Class R's, which are too slow and unsuitable for that part of the world".

The Fitzmaurice memo was sent on to the Plans Division who also thought that sending the R. Class ships to Singapore was "unsound". The D.C.N.S., Vice-Admiral Andrew Cunningham,<sup>56</sup> remarked that he had "often felt that we should show our fleet more often than we have done in recent years", but one crisis after another and the Admiralty's large capital ship reconstruction programme had left nothing to spare in the way of capital ships. "We are hardly beginning as yet to feel the benefit of the large rearmament programme in ships of other classes." The Admiralty, however, might have to send a fleet East should the Japanese show "signs of encroaching on the Netherlands East Indies".





"The moral to be drawn from the situation we now find ourselves in is that our foreign policy should be largely governed by the strength of our Navy. This principle was completely rejected by the government in 1930 and it was not until 1936 or 1937 that it was fully realized again."

Capt. V.H. Danckwerts, the Director of Plans,<sup>57</sup> was asked to comment on the Fitzmaurice memo. He had few doubts that the fleet would arrive at Singapore in time, and that the base would hold out. He also noted that it was hoped to place a capital ship in the Far East in 1942, and the Australians had been told this in confidence. But it was at present politically unacceptable to split the fleet between East and West.<sup>58</sup>

While the Admiralty was busy working on the final draft to be sent to the Foreign Office in answer to Fitzmaurice's memorandum, W. (Bill) Cavendish-Bentinck, who held at the F.O. the Middle East desk, sent the Admiralty his own account.<sup>59</sup> This told a desperate story of what might happen if the British fleet left the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>60</sup> Italy, with German help, would put troops into Libya and all would be lost, including Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. "The consequences outlined above on our strategical position might be more disastrous for the Empire as a whole, than the temporary loss by Australia and New Zealand of their seaborne trade, and the risk to those Dominions of attack by Japan."\*

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\* Going through the documents, one often wondered if the Foreign Office's right hand was aware of what the left hand was doing. Certainly the above memo was not the views expressed by Halifax, but it did represent the views of many people who were caught up in the Suez mystique.



The Director of Plans, now somewhat tired of Foreign Office memos, was tart in reply.<sup>61</sup> "The F.O. always treats France as having great military consequence against Germany, but entirely discounts anything French in the Mediterranean. " Cavendish-Bentinck's tale discounted the power of the French fleet to contain and restrain the Italian fleet in the absence of a British fleet from that area. It was all very well for Cavendish-Bentinck to say that if the fleet did not go to Singapore, it would fall; and that, if it fell, the Eastern Empire would be at Japan's mercy. "It would then seem of little use to hold on to Egypt, where the principal reason for our presence is the security of the Suez Canal."

The C.N.S. was also annoyed about the F.O.'s flow of paper, describing this last one as yet one more on the subject of whether the fleet should remain in the Mediterranean or go to the Far East:

The fact of the matter is that at the present, the British Empire is not strong enough to fight the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese at the same time, but unfortunately some of the good people who write essays on the subject seem to think that the Navy can carry all those wars on its back.

But he also believed that the loss of Singapore, although it would be serious, "would not necessarily mean the loss of our Eastern Empire for all time"; whereas the loss of Egypt and the Suez Canal would damage British prestige in Europe and throughout the world.

The final Admiralty reply was a toned-down reflection of the more adamant views that had been expressed internally by members of the Board,<sup>62</sup> that it might be necessary to send either a capital ship or a small fast battlecruiser squadron





East of Suez, to protect communications. This was somewhat different from basing the main fleet at Singapore, but it was a concept that helped lay the foundation for the dispatch of the Prince of Wales and Repulse to the Far East two years later.

They also noted that,

It might come about in the future, indeed it might already be true, that the maintenance of our Imperial interests demands the abandonment of the Mediterranean as the price of reinforcing our position in the Far East. But such a step could only be decided upon by the Government and presumably after consultation with the Dominions.

Unless the Navy is maintained at a strength sufficient to secure our position in those parts of the world which are vital to the existence of the Empire, it is impracticable to carry out our chosen policy as and when we wish. But while, in theory, naval strength must be based upon foreign policy; in practice there is a limit, governed by money, men and material, and determined by the Government of the day, beyond which our armaments cannot be advanced; and when this is reached the tables are turned, and foreign policy must depend upon naval strength, unless risk of war, and even of unsuccessful, war, is to be incurred.

Surely this was as clear an exposition of the relationship between naval strength and foreign policy as one would wish to see. Unfortunately, the time to obtain this universal naval strength was not available. The demands at home were becoming too pressing and too immediate.

It was becoming apparent that the overall formulation of British Far Eastern naval strategy was dependent on three major and fast-changing considerations: the situation in Europe the posture of the United States, and the progress in British rearmament.<sup>63</sup> This latter now deserves attention for the continual pessimism of the C.O.S. concerning British naval strength,<sup>64</sup> and the Cabinet's fears of war with Germany



on the one hand, and with Japan and/or Italy on the other, laid bare the desperate condition of the Navy. As the Director of Plans had noted in 1939,<sup>65</sup> "it must be pointed out that it takes longer to build and man a fleet than to create a potential enemy".

The crisis in central Europe, centring on Austria, brought the spectre of war all too close. With war or peace hanging in the balance, Chamberlain instructed the C.O.S. to report on the consequences of Britain and France going to war against Germany. On March 28, 1939, they presented their assessment<sup>66</sup>- yet another litany of British deficiencies.

Chamberlain, with this gloomy C.O.S. appreciation before him, tried to maneuver Italy away from Germany, to lessen odds against Britain if possible. As long as he felt there was a chance to "appease" the Italian Fascists, he was still willing to accept the order of defence priorities and still unwilling to "interfere with normal trade".<sup>67</sup>

Yet the demands of Imperial defence were not necessarily the same for fighting a war in Europe, or a war in the Atlantic. In Europe, the key was seen to be the R.A.F. by the politicians, while the Army had a subservient role. The Navy, in the Atlantic battle, would only need a force capable of meeting the German Navy, and capable also of keeping home waters secure. Yet of all the services, it was the Navy which was most involved with Imperial defence and the communications of Empire East of Suez. Britain's willingness to build up the Royal Navy was a measure of her Imperial commitment.

In early 1938,<sup>68</sup> the First Lord Duff Cooper, arguing for his estimates, pointed out to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, that relations with Japan had deteriorated, which might compel the dispatch of the fleet to the Far East.



In such conditions, Cooper asked that the expanded naval programme be allowed. Simon said no: the problems of finance were beyond the capacity of British industry. The cost of £70 million was too much.<sup>69</sup> Once again, the memos went back and forth, Cooper striving to have the fleet built up to meet its commitments; Simon just as tenaciously refusing to agree to anything that might lead to "financial disorganization such as would weaken the power of resistance of the country".<sup>70</sup>

Much of the problem was the Government's continued unwillingness to interfere with "normal trade".<sup>71</sup> So, while the Japanese marched, and the Germans took Austria, Britain refused to recognize that the security risks abroad were far greater than the financial risks at home. And no matter how the First Lord tried, he found it impossible to get Simon to move away from the "rations" allocated from the defence budget for the Navy. "He (Simon) felt that the international situation did not justify any additional departure from the scheme in force with the Navy".<sup>72</sup> Hankey could write:<sup>73</sup> "I have always felt the gravest misgivings at the attempt of the Treasury last June (1937) to reassert full financial control within 12 months of making a start in the real rehabilitation of our defences". The "rationing" system was the product of the legalistic mind of Inskip, who had submitted his plan to the Cabinet in February 1938.<sup>74</sup>

The amount to be allocated to all three services was £1,570 million over a five-year period, 1937 to 1941. The First Lord was restive about the rations allocated to the Navy and he submitted an appeal April 13,<sup>75</sup> for additional funds to provide weapons for the fleet. As the correspondence grew, the issue became not just one of cash, which was important enough; but of the role of the Navy in British strategic planning. Once that had been determined, the Government would





know just what size of fleet it had to subsidize. In a closely-reasoned memorandum, the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence<sup>76</sup> naturally adhered to the policy of the rationing system. The question then was, should the system accommodate the Navy's demands? The Navy wanted a "New Standard Fleet". This was to provide for a fleet to proceed to the Far East, and to have sufficient forces remaining at home to control home waters, while the entire Navy was to be redistributed if a two-ocean war occurred. This standard, as Inskip pointed out, had never been accepted by the Cabinet. Now the time had come for the Cabinet to decide just what size and what kind of fleet it wanted.

Inskip pointed out that a decision was immediately required, since ships take years to build, and the personnel to man them required almost as much time to train. More specifically, he stressed that if the D.R.C. standard was adopted, "economies would have to be made, either in the field of defence, or in the social services".

As far as Inskip was concerned, the Navy had to trim its sails. Air power was of greater importance and the time period in which Britain had to get ready for war was too short for a large-scale building programme. Inskip did not believe that Japan, involved in China as she was, could be as dangerous as the Admiralty felt. He therefore suggested cutting back on aircraft carriers. They were expensive, and the additional cost of the necessary aircraft made them more expensive still. Capital ships were to be reduced in numbers, but worst of all, for the long term, was Inskip's suggestion that the building of light vessels be cut back.

On July 27, 1939, the Cabinet, after reviewing the various reports concerning naval strength, decided on a compromise,



and allowed the Navy a ration of £410 millions over the next three years.<sup>77</sup> In fact, a decision was long overdue, for it had been in December 1937 that Inskip had first raised the whole question concerning the strength of the Fleet.<sup>78</sup>

In early February 1939, the C.N.S. had presented to the C.I.D.<sup>79</sup> a dismal picture of British naval strength, including a summary of the production-delays caused by shortages of material and lack of industrial capability. Not only would the fleet be insufficient to the task of fighting Germany and Japan (leaving aside Italy), but, as Backhouse pointed out, the Admiralty had always said that they needed 70 cruisers even when the "only attack envisioned was from the Japanese Fleet". Now there was an even more desperate shortage of cruisers as well as smaller ships for escort duty.

Yet the war which the Admiralty was preparing to fight might not be the war they had to fight. Initially, the Admiralty had discounted the submarine. Their main concern was German raiders which, slipping out into the Atlantic, would wreak havoc along the shipping lanes. Nevertheless, the Admiralty felt that coastal convoys would be required. In order to escort these convoys, small ships would be needed. In addition, merchant ships must continue to be built, and this would necessarily affect the naval building program. The ravages made in the shipbuilding industry due to the depression and the run-down of the heavy armaments industry were now making themselves felt.

Time was what was needed, for with each passing day, the number of options closed off. But there was not to be enough of it, nor, in fact, of money or resources. The increased Navy estimates were mainly absorbed by higher costs and the necessity for additional shipborne defence systems.<sup>80</sup>





The crisis generated by Munich and the subsequent German seizure of the remainder of Czechoslovakia led to the beginning of the Naval Emergency Programme, or the building up to the two-power standard fleet.<sup>81</sup>

This aspiration of building a two-power Navy however, was not to be realized. At the meeting of the C.I.D. on July 6, 1939, which agreed to the emergency two-power programme, the First Lord, Earl Stanhope, stated that "at the present moment we could not build even two ships owing to a shortage of 16" gun capacity". The situation was becoming desperate due to German naval construction on the one hand, and Japanese strength on the other.<sup>82</sup> It was only grudgingly that the Chancellor accepted the new financial demands<sup>83</sup> of the increased building programme.

Faced with a deteriorating European situation, a hostile Japan in the Far East, the British Government and the C.O.S. commenced a more positive approach to the French. For here at least was one nation which could be termed an ally, and whose naval strength would be badly needed should war commence in two oceans.



FOOTNOTES

1. Feiling, Op. Cit., p. 336
2. Ibid, p. 323
3. See James B. Crowley, Japan's Quest for Autonomy, Princeton, 1966. Also G.E. Hubbard, Survey of International Affairs, 1937, p. 165.
4. Louis, Op. Cit., p. 242.
5. Cab. 13(37)10.
6. Dilks, Op. Cit., p. 30.
7. F.E.S.(37), 1st meeting, 1/9/37, Adm. 1/9909.
8. Adm. PD06396, Adm. 1/9909.
9. C.N.S. Memo for Far Eastern Committee F.E.S. (4), 22/9/37., Adm. 1/9909.
10. Cooper to C.N.S., 13/9/37, Adm. 1/9909, and Cooper to C.N.S., 18/9/37, Adm. 1/9909.
11. C.O.S. 596, Cab. 53/32.
12. Draft Report, 11/10/37 in C.O.S. 523, 11/10/37, Cab. 53/39. Also J.P. (240), 15/11/37, Cab. 55/10, and D.P.C.P.S., Cab. 16/182.
13. C.O.S. 523, 11/10/37, Cab. 53/39.
14. S.E. Morison, History of U.S.N. Naval Operations in the Pacific, Vol. IV, New York, 1948., p. 49. Also Sumner Welles, Seven Decisions that Shaped History, N.Y., 1950, p. 8. Also M.S. Watson, Chief of Staff, Pre-War Plans and Preparations, Washington, 1950, p. 93. Also Pearl Harbor Attack, 79th Congress, 1st Session, Washington, 1946, p. 4273-77.
15. See 207/38, Adm. 1/9822. Also Adm. 116/3922.



16. Record of Conversations signed 13/1/37, T.S.U. Phillips, Cpt. R.N., R.E. Ingersoll, Capt. U.S.N., Adm. 1/9822.
17. Testimony of Admiral Ingersoll, 12/2/46 before Joint Congressional Committee investigating the attack on Pearl Harbor, 79th Congress, 1st Session, Pearl Harbor Attack, Washington, 1946, pp. 7273-77.
18. Times, 13/11/34 Also Adm. Sir Roger Bayley, Pull Together, London, 1939, Chapter 13, Also Times, 30/7/34, Also C.I.D. 1389-B, Cab. 4/27, 207/38, Adm. 1/9899, and N.Y. Times, 14/2/38.
19. Dilks. Op. Cit. p. 35.
20. F407/84/10 F.O. 371/22106.
21. Memo S.S.F.A. to C.I.D. 16/12/37, C.I.D., 1373-B Cab. 4/27.
22. Eden's resignation from the Cabinet was connected with Chamberlain's "almost instinctive contempt for the Americans" which was completely contrary to Eden's own views. This attitude of Chamberlain's coupled with the complete disagreement between Chamberlain and Eden over appeasing the Italians, forced Eden to quit the Government, which he did on February 20, 1938. See Dilks, Op. Cit., pp. 51-55. Also A. Eden (Lord Avon), Facing the Dictators, London, 1962, pp. 580, et. passim.
23. Dispatch H.M. Ambassador, Paris F.O. C8674/3285/17, 17/12/37, in C.O.S. 654 Cab. 53/35 and J.P. 255 Cab. 55/11. Eden via William Strang, Head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, had proposed Staff Talks with the French and Belgians in a letter to the C.I.D. on December 16, 1938. The C.O.S., who looked at the issue, referred to the dismal response Britain received in 1935-1936. C.O.S. 511, 1/9/36, Cab. 53/29; also C.I.D. 1260-B, Cab. 4/25. Strang also noted the history of attempted staff conversations and contacts during the early months of 1936. See C.I.D. 1394-B, 4/2/38, Cab. 4/27. Also C.O.S. 680, Cab. 53/36. Eden, during a Cabinet meeting on December 22, tried to get some British commitment to put British troops on the Continent. This idea was turned down. Cab. 49(37), 22/12/37. See also: J.P. 255, 1/1/38, Cab. 55/11.





24. C.I.D. 1394-B, 4/2/38, Cab. 4/37, and C.O.S. 680, Cab. 53/36.
25. C.P. 316(37), Op. Cit.
26. C.O.S. 691, 21/2/38, Cab. 53/37, and D.P. (P) 18, Cab. 16/182.
27. C.O.S. 698, 28/3/38, Cab. 53/37, and D.P. (P) 22, Cab. 16/183A.
28. C.I.D. 319, 11/4/38, Cab. 2/7.
29. The C.O.S. draft report of July 1938, Cab. 55/12.
30. C.O.S. (J.P.), Draft 19/9/38, Cab. 55/13.
31. Dilks, Op. Cit., pp. 107-108.
32. C.O.S. 765, 4/10/38, Cab. 53/41.
33. D.P. (p) 35, 19/10/38, Cab. 16/183A.
34. C.O.S. 733, Cab. 53/39, and C.I.D. 1432-B, 31/5/38, Cab. 4/37.
35. C.I.D. 326th meeting, 2/6/38, Cab. 2/7.
36. Sir Thomas Inskip was strongly against the conversations as he claimed that there was no need for any special redistribution of the Fleet required, and thus none required of the French; and thus the talks were a waste of time, particularly as any French move would be at British behest, which implied a commitment. C.I.D. 1448-B, Cab. 4/28. Also Cab. 31(38), 6/7/38.
37. C.I.D. 328th meeting, 30/6/38, Cab. 2/7.
38. Cab. 31 (38) and C.P. 153(38), 1/7/38.
39. C.O.S. 265th meeting, 14/12/38, Cab. 53/10, also J.P. 338, 9/12/38, Cab. 55/14.
40. R.I.I.A. Documents, 1938, Vol. I, p. 352.



41. See M03634/38, Adm. 1/9909.
42. Crosby to F.O. 7/11/38, No. 485, 30/104/38 F 7/2115/12115/40 and M07590/38, Adm. 1/9909.
43. F.O. to Adm., 8/12/38, M07590/38, Adm. 1/9909.
44. D.B.F.P. 3rd Series, Vol. VIII, N. 308.
45. Louis, Op. Cit., p. 255.
46. Louis, Op. Cit., pp. 256-59, Also D.P.F.P., 3rd Series, Vol. VIII, No. 433.
47. Nigel Ronald to Admiralty, 8/12/38, M07590/38, Adm. 1/9909. As the Secretary to the Board wrote: "The Board may be interested in this dispatch (from Crosby) through the suggestion that a battle squadron should be sent on a tour around the world, in the present state of European politics, with the primary purpose of impressing Siam, is a little ingenious." Secretary to Board, 9/1/39, M07590/38, Adm. 1/9909.
48. Appreciation by Secretary 16/12/38, approved by First Sea Lord 21/12/38 and D.O.P. Capt. V.H. Dandkwerts, 21/12/38, all in M07590/38, Adm. 1/9909.
49. Ronald to Crosby, 18/1/39, F403/403/40, Also F.O. to Admiralty 13/2/39 F 478/471/61.
50. See Preface by E.L. Woodward to Vol. XIII, D.P.F.P. 3rd series, and Nicholas R. Clifford, Retreat from China: British Policy in the Far East, 1937-1941, Seattle, 1967.
51. Craigie to Halifax, 14/12/38, No. 1016 651/250/38 F471/471/61. Also M07590/38 and M01188/39, Adm. 1/9909.
52. Memo respecting the proposal to station a British Battle squadron permanently at Singapore. F.O. 21/1/39 in M07590, Adm. 1/9909.
53. C.N.S. Comments on D.O.P., Draft, M01188/39, 7/2/39, Adm. 1/9909.
54. See D.R. (P) 35 and 44, Cab. 16/183A.





55. C.N.S. to First Lord, 16/2/39 M01188/39, Adm. 1/9909.
56. M1188/39, 1/3/39, Ibid. The C.N.S. felt that the D.C.N.S.' remarks were a bit hard, and felt that the reply to the F.O. should be softened by a covering letter, which would take note of the fact that by 1942, the Admiralty hoped to put a capital ship east of Suez.
57. Comments by D.C.N.S. M01188/39, 12 and 13/3/39, Op. Cit.
58. This statement was added in the second draft; the first draft of the 12th of December was more blunt and did not refer to any consultation with the Dominions. This was a large alteration from the C.N.S. comments which did not even suggest consultation with the Dominions in respect to sending the Fleet east, or for that matter, even recommend that the policy of sending the R.N. to Singapore was a fixed one.
59. Cavendish-Bentinck to Admiralty, M02397/39, 18/3/39, Adm. 1/9909.
60. See also D.P. (P) 44, Cab. 16/183A.
61. D.P. to F.O. M01960/39, 22/3/39, Adm. 1/9909.
62. Adm. to F.O. 29/3/39, M01188/39, Adm. 1/9909.
63. Woodward, Preface to Vol. XIII, 3rd Series, D.B.F.P. Op. Cit.
64. See for example 53/1937, Adm. 1/9081 and 62/1937, Adm. 1/9087. Carrier replacement programme M0237/32, Adm. 1/9342, and Investigations into differences in equipment and Admiralty Reports to the D.R.C. 1932-1935, Vol. I, Adm. 116/5 and Review of Naval Policy developments subsequent to D.R.C. 1932-1934, 1355 Vol. 3, Adm. 116/5.
65. Memo D.O.P. M01188/39, 13/3/39, Adm. 1/9909.
66. C.O.S. 698, 28/3/38, Cab. 53/37, and D.P. (P) 22, Cab. 16/183A.
67. Cab. 16(38), 28/3/38.
68. C.P. 29(38), 14/2/38.



69. C.P. 30(38), 11/2/38.
70. See C.P. 34(38), 16/2/38 and C.P. 42(38), 18/2/38.
71. Memo - Hankey to C.I.D. 28/3/38, C.I.D. 1416-B, Cab. 4/27 and Cab. 16(38), 23/3/38.
72. Cab. 5(38), 16/2/38.
73. Hankey to Inskip, 13/4/38, Cab. 21/497.
74. C.P. 24(38) 8/2/38, and Chancellor of Exchequer to Cooper, 31/7/38, 91/1938, Adm. 1/9672.
75. C.P. 92(38), 13/4/38.
76. C.P. 170(38), 12/7/38.
77. Cab. 53(38), 27/7/38; also D.P.(P) 19, 29/7/38, Cab. 16/182. See also Cab. 48(38), 20/7/38 and Adm. Naval Const., 91/1938, 29/7/38, Adm. 1/9672.
78. C.P. 316(37), 15/12/37, also Cab. 49(37), 22/12/37.
79. C.I.D. 3/2/39, Cab. 4/29.
80. C.P. 14(39), 15/139.
81. D.P. (P) 63, Cab. 16/183A. C.I.D. 364th meeting, 6/7/39, Cab. 16/183A, and Cab. 2/9.
82. C.I.D. 364th Meeting, 6/7/39, Cab. 16/183A and Cab. 2/6.
83. Simon to Chatfield, 10/7/39, C.P. 148(39).



CHAPTER VII

FRIENDS, FOES AND NAVAL STRATEGY

Since January 1939, the C.O.S. had been preparing a European appreciation which was presented to the Defence Policy (Plans) Sub-Committee of the C.I.D. on February 20.<sup>1</sup> They defined the broad strategic problems facing the British Empire, and noted that the "geographical combination of enemies" could not be worse, including, as it did, Germany, Italy and Japan.

There was little succor to be gained from France, who was unprepared for war. The policy which therefore commended itself was defensive: to hold off the enemy's land and air forces, while the allies (France and Britain) exerted economic pressure. In the Mediterranean, the Allies could hold the Eastern and Western ends, while Italy would control the centre. But the most serious consequences would arise should Japan enter the war, and on this subject, the C.O.S. were as pessimistic as they had always been.

They accepted that if Japan entered the war, a fleet would have to be sent to Singapore. This would leave only reduced British naval forces in the Mediterranean. The result would be that control of the Eastern Mediterranean would pass to Italy. The pressure that could be brought against the Italians would come from the French Fleet operating in the Western Mediterranean.

So, the first notice they would receive that a war had started in the Far East would come with a Japanese attack on Hong Kong. This, they believed, would be followed by an assault on Singapore. The Japanese might also try to take North Borneo, to gain its oil resources and as a stepping-stone to Singapore. However, in their final analysis, the C.O.S.





reverted back to the basic British strategic assessment concerning a war in the Far East: it was unlikely that Japan would conduct the large-scale operations described, since they could never be sure when the Royal Navy would arrive to sever her communications. They also agreed that Japan would have five Divisions\* available for overseas operations, but that they could not transport this size of force due to a lack of shipping.

They were equally optimistic concerning a Japanese assault on North Borneo. In such an event, the Japanese would come within range of British air forces stationed on Singapore. In addition, the Japanese would have to maintain a considerable naval force in the South China Seas, far from their home bases. Once the Royal Navy had arrived at Singapore, the British would have the advantage of a base close at hand, and could engage the Japanese forces under favourable conditions.

The C.O.S. concluded that because of Imperial commitment a fleet would have to be sent to the Far East. Once it had arrived, the danger would be alleviated and the vital sea route to Egypt and the Middle East from the Pacific would be made secure.\*\*

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\* In fact, in 1941-1942, the Japanese employed 8 Divisions. (Malaya: Guards and 18th Division; Hong Kong: 38th Division, which was shifted to N.E. Is.; Philippines: 16th and 48th Divisions; Burma: 33rd and 55th Divisions; and N.E. Is., 2nd, 38th, 48th and one Inf. Bde. Gp.)

\*\* It was just as vital to keep the Eastern Route open running from the Pacific to the Middle East as it was from the United Kingdom to Suez, for most of the men and material for the Defence of the Middle East, including oil, would arrive from that direction.



This C.O.S. report was more optimistic than many they had made before. Certainly the C.N.S. and the First Lord of the Admiralty had questioned the wisdom of sending a fleet to the Far East. Regardless of promises made to the Dominions, they did not agree that to abandon the Mediterranean to the Italians in order to dispatch a fleet to the Far East was sound strategy.<sup>2</sup> The Admiralty's views emerged again when the above C.O.S. report was discussed at the 348th meeting of the C.I.D. on February 24, 1939.<sup>3</sup> The First Lord expressed his dismay at the idea of the Mediterranean being denuded of ships in the event Japan entered the war. While admitting that the British Government had given assurances to the Dominions that a fleet would be sent, he felt that it would be sufficient to send perhaps one or two capital ships to Singapore which would act as a deterrent to Japanese plans of aggression, particularly if the U.S.N. was in the Pacific. Chamberlain tended to agree. He noted that the promises made to the Dominions at the Imperial Conference in 1937 concerning the dispatch of the fleet had contained as escape clause: that the strength of the fleet to be sent "must depend upon our resources and the state of the war in the European theatre". Chamberlain shrewdly pointed out that this phrase "appeared to condition the unqualified and categorical 'promise' made at the time".

Should the Dominions now be informed of the position? Some members of the C.I.D. thought that if the Dominions were made aware of British vacillations concerning the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East, there would be serious repercussions on local public opinion. Chatfield, now Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, firmly declared that it would be far better to sacrifice the Mediterranean and Middle East than to allow Japan





to gain unchallenged control of sea-communications in the Indian Ocean and Pacific. Contrary to what the Admiralty maintained, Chatfield was convinced that seven or eight capital ships could be sent to the East and the British "could trust to our superior efficiency to hold the position and contain the Japanese Fleet": in the same way as the vastly-inferior German Fleet had contained the Grand Fleet for four years during World War I. Considering the contentious nature of the subject of the promise made to the Dominions, it was not surprising that the meeting broke up having decided only that in the first year of the war, a defensive posture should be adopted, but that the Italian Fleet should be reduced in strength as soon as possible after hostilities commenced. The C.I.D. also agreed to set up a new sub-committee, to be called the Strategical Appreciation Sub-Committee, which was to examine the Chiefs of Staff European Appreciation, and to suggest orders of priority for those recommendations which involved expenditure on armaments outside of the already approved programmes.\*

Chatfield<sup>4</sup> might place great faith in superior efficiency of the R.N., but this was not shared by the Australian C.O.S. Moreover, the question of what size and what kind of fleet would or might be sent East had always been an open one.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning, the Admiralty wavered between sending the Main Fleet or sending a small, fast, balanced force of two to four capital ships. These would act as a deterrent to the Japanese and protect communications in the Indian Ocean, but would not challenge the

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\* The Committee consisted of the Secretary of State for War, (Hore-Belisha), Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (W.S. Morrison), the C.I.G.S. (Lord Gort), First Lord of the Admiralty (Stanhope), First Sea Lord (Backhouse), Secretary of State for Air (Kingsley Wood), C.A.S. (Cyril Newall), and the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence (Lord Chatfield), who was the Chairman.



Japanese in the China Seas. The First Sea Lord, Sir Roger Backhouse, came back to this concept.<sup>6</sup> Looking at the number of ships available, he felt that four or five capital ships could safeguard the Indian Ocean, and could act as a deterrent if they were all fast ships. Backhouse also raised the point that France might not be too pleased if the British denuded the Mediterranean of ships to send them to the Far East. As it transpired, Backhouse's concept was adopted after the Japanese had struck in 1941.

There now began an interdepartmental debate concerning the dispatch of the Fleet to the Far East that occupied a great deal of the time of the C.I.D., the Strategic Sub-Committee and the D.P.(P) Committee.

In early March,<sup>7</sup> the Strategical Appreciation Sub-Committee met to discuss the "European Appreciation" of the C.O.S. Backhouse pointed out the shortage of capital ships to meet all commitments in a war against the three Axis powers. He asked what orders should be given to the C-in-C Eastern Fleet if the Japanese moved south in force, and he had but five or six ships at Singapore. That was not answered, though Chatfield wondered if British public opinion would tolerate the fall of Hong Kong, and the loss of the Dutch East Indies. Stanhope said he felt the C.O.S. did not take enough cognisance of the presence of the U.S.N. on the Japanese flank. As long as the American Fleet was in the Pacific, Japan was unlikely to move very far. If the R.N. kept three fast capital ships in the Mediterranean, they could move East if required. As for the commitment to the Dominions to send a fleet to Singapore, Stanhope noted "we had not said when the fleet would sail".





Backhouse took up his previous position: the French might not agree to the Royal Navy being sent to the Far East. He suggested that the French not be told of the British plans regarding the deployment of British naval forces East of Suez. It was likely that in any event the Cabinet might not sanction the dispatch of the fleet to Singapore, for such a move might jeopardize the chances of a successful conclusion to the war in Europe; and if the war were lost in Europe, "it would be lost everywhere".

This was sound thinking on the part of the First Sea Lord. Yet an examination of the tone of the meeting also suggests adherence to traditional British Eastern policy-propping up of Turkey, support of Greece and maintenance of the loyalty of the Arabs. It appears that policies once adopted are pursued relentlessly and generate their own perpetuation. Policy-makers seem more at home in dealing with traditional situations which they know and which have historical foundations. They are not so comfortable in coping with new situations, such as the naval defence in the Far East or fighting a two-ocean war, where there was no history or continuity of policy.

The Committee met again March 13.<sup>8</sup> Chatfield told his colleagues that the Acting High Commissioner for Australia had an inkling that Britain was weakening in her commitment to send a fleet to Singapore. He also noted that the C.O.S. had maintained that Britain could not undertake a war against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously; but at the same time, it would be far better to lose the Far Eastern Empire by fighting than by default. In the first case, Chatfield felt "it would be a disgrace". Backhouse stated that two capital ships would be sufficient to safeguard communications in the Indian Ocean, but unfortunately they were not available at present.





He believed, and the C.I.G.S. Lord Gort agreed with him, "that the Japanese were a very cautious race. They might go for Hong Kong, but they would not embark on expeditions further afield until they were absolutely certain of their position". This was hedging, and it was W.S. Morrison who reminded the meeting of the promise made in 1937, that no commitments in the Mediterranean would stop the Fleet from moving East.

Chatfield added that the Dominions had agreed to co-operate with the R.N. in war, and there was "a further factor which they (the Admiralty) had in their minds: that if we did not show willingness to look after our Dominions, they might consider whether it would be advantageous for them to look to America for assistance". But there were grave implications for the three services. If Britain were fighting for her life in Europe, "she should have to sing a minor tune in the Far East and try to prevent the Japanese coming in against us". But if they did, what would Britain do? The answer was difficult. Stanhope, as before, had his eyes firmly fixed on the Middle East, a view shared by Backhouse. Help from France was not seen as forthcoming. Gort felt that it was better to have a fleet arrive after the outbreak of war than to put two capital ships in the Far East at that moment. The only definite conclusion the Committee could come to was that the Admiralty was to draw up yet another appreciation of the situation in respect to the Far East problem!

On April 5, as instructed, the D.C.N.S., Rear-Admiral Andrew Cunningham submitted the Admiralty's views regarding the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East.<sup>9</sup>



It must be pointed out" Cunningham wrote, "that the C.O.S. have repeatedly stated that ... our present and potential naval strength is insufficient, and indeed is not designed to engage three naval powers ... without grave risk. Secondly, the number of capital ships that the R.N. has available is at its lowest ebb. Of the Navy's 15 heavy ships, 4 are under construction,\* Hood is in dock on six weeks' notice and Revenge is on three months' notice until May 1, 1939. The ships available for war service have been reduced to ten, of which six were in home waters and four in the Mediterranean. 10

In the event of war in Europe, certain cruisers were to be retained on the China Station and in Australian and New Zealand waters, while R.A.F. and Army forces were to be reinforced at Singapre, to make it clear to Japan that Britain had no intention of abandoning her position in the Far East.

The number of capital ships that could be spared for the Far East was uncertain. Whether or not a capital ship-force would have to be sent, was not open to question. However, whether this should be done by sacrificing British interests in the Mediterranean was a question which would only be decided at the time. Cunningham assumed that Japan might intervene to help relieve the pressure that the Allies were exerting on Italy and Germany. It was possible under these conditions that if the departure of the fleet could be delayed

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\* It is perhaps worth recalling once again, the continual opposition on the part of the Treasury and the Chancellors of the Exchequer to the Admiralty's plans to modernize the Fleet in the mid-1930's. Now with war approaching, the ships were taken in hand, but it was too late, for there was never enough time to modernize most of the R Class ships.





until one of the enemy powers could be eliminated, then it would put the Admiralty in a position to deal with Japan in due course. Cunningham stressed that the British should not be taken in by Japanese "threats and feints designed to draw off our main forces" to the East without actually going to war. Equally important was the political consequences of giving up the Mediterranean, which would undermine British relations with Turkey, Greece and the Arab world.

As for the United States, her attitude to a declaration of war by Japan would also exercise a profound effect. The movement of the U.S.N. to Pearl Harbor might equally restrict Japanese strategy and allow the British to delay the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East. It was a hope that was to emerge again in 1940.

The Admiralty could provide few definite answers for the S.A.C. The variables were too numerous and could not be accurately assessed. It was impossible for the Admiralty, with just cause, to state just how soon after Japan came into the war, a fleet could be sent to the Far East. Nor was it possible to lay down precisely just what size of fleet would be sent, and its composition.

The naval appreciation was discussed at various meetings of the S.A.C.<sup>11</sup> And, as before, the sometimes tedious arguments continued concerning the relative importance of the Middle East and the Far East. In all the arguments and discussions, the American factor kept gaining in importance.<sup>12</sup> There was consensus that much would depend on the American attitude towards Japan, and the presence of the U.S.N. in the Pacific, which would give the Japanese second thoughts about entering the war. The S.A.C. believed that as long as



the Americans demonstrated a tough attitude to the Japanese, they would not move South. The best situation, the S.A.C. agreed, would be that the United States would join the Allies against Japan once war started and would take part in joint naval operations. Still, as they noted, Japan's actions would be predicated on the outcome of the war in Europe. If the Allies were containing the Germans, the Japanese would hesitate. If the Allies were hard pressed, Japan might well seize her chance and enter the war.

It is now necessary to leave the meetings of the various committees and turn to the vexing problem that faced the British when they came to deal with the Dominions on the one hand, and the French on the other.

During 1938, the Admiralty, the C.O.S. and the J.P.S.C. had all been advising the Pacific Dominions concerning naval co-operation. In addition, the Admiralty and the Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards had agreed on the disposition of naval forces in the event of a Far Eastern war.<sup>13</sup>

At a higher level, the signs of doubt were starting to emerge. On March 8, 1938, Chamberlain,<sup>14</sup> when addressing the Commons, suggested that British defence priorities were such as to place the protection of her overseas possession in third place. Two days later, J. A. Lyons, the Australian Prime Minister, cabled Chamberlain demanding clarification, as Chamberlain's speech had caused "misgivings in the minds of the Australian people" and was to be questioned in the Australian Parliament.<sup>15</sup>

In replying to Lyons, Chamberlain equated protection of the trade routes with the vital necessity of holding strategic bases, which "must be rendered secure"; and Singapore, "as the pivotal point of the whole system of naval defence of the





Empire east of Suez ... continues to receive high priority ... The idea that in the event of war we may not be able to defend our overseas possessions, is entirely false ... we are in fact in a better position in this respect than we were three years ago."<sup>16</sup>

The position was indeed better, but not good. The growing European tension had also led the New Zealand Government to ask the British just how far the pledge given in 1937 now held good. On August 4, the New Zealand Government were informed that it was not justified in assuming that the R.N. would go to Singapore "in sufficient strength to serve as a strong deterrent against any threat to Commonwealth interests".<sup>17</sup> This was harsh news indeed. It appeared that the pledge was becoming qualified out of existence.

However, the J.P.S.C., with the authority of the C.O.S., reversed the tone of the August telegram to New Zealand,<sup>18</sup> repeating what had been stated in 1937, that in a war with France as an ally against the 3 Axis powers, "the security of the United Kingdom and the security of Singapore would be the keystones on which the survival of the British Commonwealth of Nations would depend." To ensure the security of Singapore a fleet would be sent east of Suez, while France took on the problem of the Italian Fleet in the Mediterranean. As long as Britain could hold Egypt and thus the Suez Canal, it would be possible to reinforce the Middle East by sea. The Red Sea and the Indian Ocean would be protected by the Far East Fleet.

In regard to an attack on New Zealand, the J.P.S.C. already repeated what had been said. Japan knew that, as long as the British Fleet remained in being, she must not disperse her main naval forces in case the British Fleet arrived at Singapore. Japan would also have to take account of the attitude





of the U.S.S.R. and the United States. Once the British Fleet arrived her communications would be easily interrupted. "In fact, the Japanese would then find very great difficulty in maintaining their position ... and the threat to New Zealand would fade".

According to the J.P.S.C., no change "has occurred to affect the considerations which governed the undertaking given at the Imperial Conference in 1937, that in the event of war with Japan, we should send a fleet to Eastern waters irrespective of the situation elsewhere".

In these circumstances, New Zealand should maintain her traditional policy of providing for naval forces to co-operate with the R.N. That was the most effective measure she could take for her own security, since the defeat of the United Kingdom would lead to the breakup of the British Empire.

Unfortunately, through what Col. Hastings Ismay, the Secretary of the C.I.D., referred to as a "complete misunderstanding, and gross stupidity", a copy of the minutes of the 348th meeting of the C.I.D. which had discussed paper D.P.(P) 44, and had cast doubt on the automatic dispatch of the fleet, had been sent to the Australian Liaison Officer at the Cabinet Office, and then forwarded to the Acting High Commissioner, Mr. Duncan. Duncan immediately<sup>19</sup> arranged to see Ismay to discuss the paper. Ismay, himself, says he was in a very "unexpected situation", for he took it for granted "that no Australian had any reason to think that the question of the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East was even under consideration".

Ismay, with diplomatic finesse, told Duncan that the observations made at the C.I.D. meeting had been "in the nature



not of fixed conclusions, but of tentative opinions", and that the true policy was that which had been communicated to the New Zealand Government, stressing that "no change had occurred to affect the considerations which governed the undertaking given at the Imperial Conference in 1937." He also told Duncan that the S.A.C. had been set up to examine Paper D.P. (P) 44 of February 20 in more detail, and that the Admiralty had been asked to prepare a memorandum on the size of the fleet that could be sent to the Far East if Britain was fighting the three Axis Powers. According to Ismay, Duncan appeared satisfied with the explanation given. Ismay also told him that he, Duncan, could not understand what had happened at the C.I.D. meeting since he had not read the contents of the D.P. (P) 44 paper, which had not been circulated to the Dominions

It was obvious that neither Australia nor New Zealand were now as certain of British commitments in the Far East as they had been previously. Debate went on in both countries concerning the validity of British promises, for hinging upon it was the implication that Australia should not send an expeditionary force overseas to help Britain, but should keep her forces at home for local defence.<sup>20</sup>

On March 19, 1939, Lyons cabled Chamberlain that as Australia was willing to dispatch the A.I.F. abroad,<sup>21</sup>

he would appreciate, for the information of the present Government, whether assurance can be given that Australia is entitled to assume that in the event of war with Japan, the United Kingdom Government would send a fleet to Singapore within appropriate time, capable of containing the Japanese Fleet to a degree sufficient to prevent a major act of aggression against Australia.

Chamberlain, in order to calm these Australian





apprehensions, replied on March 20.

In the event of war with Germany and Italy, should Japan join in against us, it would still be His Majesty's Government's full intention to dispatch a fleet to Singapore. If we were fighting against such a combination never envisaged in our earlier plans, the size of that fleet would necessarily be dependent on (a) the moment when Japan entered the war, and (b) what losses, if any, our opponents or ourselves had previously sustained.

It would however, be our intention to achieve three main objectives:

- 1) The prevention of any major operation against Australia, New Zealand or India.
- 2) To keep open our sea communications.
- 3) To prevent the fall of Singapore.<sup>22</sup>

Chamberlain concluded in hoping that this would be assurance enough to provide the basis for Australian defence policy.

Certainly the Australians were not told of Halifax's talks with the American Ambassador, Joseph M. Kennedy, two days after Chamberlain's cable had been sent. Halifax asked for the U.S.N. to remain in the Pacific. Nor were they ever to see this note from Backhouse to Ismay.<sup>23</sup>

"He... is getting somewhat tired of this particular question about Australian defences. (The C.N.S.) finds that everyone has views on this subject, with not all of which he agrees... . He is afraid, however, that we cannot do anything in 1939 substantially to improve our present position."

Shortly after Chamberlain's cable to Lyons, the Australian High Commissioner, Stirling, sought clarification. It was arranged that he meet with the First Lord and D.C.N.S. to discuss the matter.<sup>24</sup> The principles that they outlined to Stirling were transmitted in a memorandum which largely repeated Chamberlain's cable to Lyons, with some embellishments. The document repeated



once again that Australia had only to fear small raids from the Japanese. Due to the distance from Japan, the necessity of unlimited time to mount a major assault, and the fact that a major attack would require great preparation, Britain would have forewarning and thus be able to dispatch the fleet to the Far East. Such a fleet based on Singapore would make it improbable that the "Japanese would ever embark on such an operation". The Australians were told that it was the Admiralty's full intention to dispatch a fleet to the Far East of sufficient strength to make the launching of any Japanese expedition a precarious operation.

These cables, conversations and memoranda sent to or given to the Pacific Dominions show that the commitment to send the fleet to the Far East had been altered almost beyond recognition. The evidence is also clear that the Dominions were not kept fully informed of the twists and turns of British Far Eastern naval policy.

While the British themselves were worrying over their Far Eastern naval policy, they had also to take into account French views about the future.

On February 8, 1939, the Cabinet had agreed that<sup>25</sup> staff conversations should be held with the French.

The C.O.S. therefore prepared a lengthy report for these conversations, entitled "British Strategical Memorandum".<sup>26</sup> This followed closely their previous European Appreciation. They reiterated the Far Eastern problem for the benefit of the French, including the 1937 promise to the Dominions. They also confirmed that a British fleet would be sent to the Far East if Japan entered the war. In such circumstances, only light naval forces would remain in the Mediterranean.

Providing the French with the British Strategic Memorandum naturally presented some difficulties. The J.P.S.C. feared<sup>27</sup>





that not to give the French a copy of the memorandum would start off conversations in the wrong atmosphere. They also recommended that the conversations should not deal with the Japanese threat, except in the most general terms. The problem of Japan's intervention could be discussed at a later date.

The conversations with the French took place in two stages. The second round started on March 29, 1939.<sup>28</sup> After much discussion on the number of capital ships available to the Royal Navy during the years 1932-1942, the British Delegation was instructed that, in the event of Japan's entering the war, the British Government would send a fleet to the Far East. The first problem about this concerned operations against the Italians in the Mediterranean. Should they go well, it was likely that these might be kept up until the Italian Navy was knocked out of the war. The second problem was the impact on Greece, Turkey and Egypt, when the British fleet left the Mediterranean. There was also the attitude of the United States to be considered, including the location of the U.S.N., and the possibility of active American assistance. The best outcome would be that the Italian Navy was seriously damaged, for this would allow the British Mediterranean fleet to go east. If the German Navy were to also suffer heavy losses, then units from the Home Fleet could be sent to Singapore. But, if neither of the Axis powers had suffered naval losses, the eastern Mediterranean or the Far East would have to be abandoned to the enemy. It would be up to the British Government of the day to decide on the redistribution of naval forces to meet the situation.

The conversations closed on May 4, 1939. The two delegations signed a series of conclusions.<sup>29</sup> One referred to





Japanese intervention, repeated the instructions of the British delegation, and noted again that the entry of the United States into the war would be "of vital importance". If the Americans did not take action, then every effort should be made to reach an understanding with them that the U.S.N. be dispatched to the Western Pacific on the outbreak of war in Europe, whether or not Japan had come into the conflict. It was also agreed that the security of the Dutch Indies and of Siam was of vital importance, and that their neutrality would be advantageous to the Allies.

The French recognized the importance of Singapore to Allied naval strategy in the Far East. They accepted that the base could not hold out indefinitely, and therefore at some stage, naval reinforcements must be sent to it. But because of the many incalculable factors, it was impossible to say when the reinforcements would be sent after Japan entered the war, and in what strength. It was also agreed that if the Allies were defeated in the West, then collapse in the Far East would automatically follow. It was thus a question of balancing risks: the issue could not be decided in advance. But the weakening of the British eastern Mediterranean fleet could not lightly be undertaken:

It must be for His Majesty's Government to decide, in consultation with the French Government at the time, on the redistribution of British Naval Forces to meet the situation with which the Allies are faced. Meanwhile, plans for Anglo-French co-operation must provide for a number of possible situations, including the two extremes: the practical abandonment temporarily of naval control in the Far East, or in the Eastern Mediterranean.

This Anglo-French accord gave the death-blow to the one-time "Fleet East of Suez Commitment". Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, had already realized this when



he read the message which was to be sent to the French to "quieten their apprehensions" about British plans to send a fleet to the Far East. He had always "understood that the dispatch of this fleet was one of the fundamental factors in our defence policy, and I need hardly stress how gravely disturbed I should be to find that it was no longer intended to put it into effect".<sup>30</sup>

Zetland was pacified when he saw a copy of Chamberlain's cable to Lyons. But he had good cause to be worried, for more and more the United States was becoming the crucial factor in keeping the Japanese under control.

At a meeting of the C.I.D. on May 2,<sup>31</sup> Chatfield noted that the "stationing of the U.S.N. in the Pacific was an important factor", and he suggested that the Americans be told of the Conversations with the French. Stanhope still would not move from his former position: that the Middle East was second only to the United Kingdom in strategic importance. "It would be impossible", he said, "to move the fleet, particularly as the dispatch of it could only take place after consultation with the French." As Inskip noted, the pledge to the Dominions had been scaled down, and Prime Ministers Bruce of Australia and Nash of New Zealand were about to arrive in London. They would demand answers concerning British Far Eastern naval plans. Chamberlain said that Bruce had been told of the modifications in British policy, and the reasons for them. He quoted his cable to Lyons of March 20.

Across the Pacific, the New Zealanders were still pressing for a more definite commitment concerning the dispatch of the fleet, should Japan enter the war. In early April 1939, as a result of their insistence, a defence conference was held at Wellington, with senior officers from the United Kingdom and





the two Dominions.<sup>32</sup>

The subject was, security arrangements in the Far East. The British seemed optimistic that, regardless of the risks in the Mediterranean, a fleet would be sent to the Far East. They also stated that Japan's intervention would not cut New Zealand's communications with Europe, and that the New Zealanders could plan their war-effort along the lines of World War I; i.e., to send an expeditionary force overseas. The New Zealanders remained sceptical. They doubted if the British really took seriously their own basic premise - that Singapore was vulnerable, and that if it fell, New Zealand was in danger.

The British delegation reported to the C.O.S. on 25th of April,<sup>33</sup> that the New Zealand Government were "not altogether happy" about the supposed arrival of the R.N. in the Far East. The U.K. delegation had "found themselves in a difficult position". They had not wished to encourage any doubts in the minds of the New Zealand Ministers regarding the assurances they had received. So the British had to take a middle way, trying to get the New Zealanders to put their defences in order, while repeating that the Japanese would not attack in force.

The British delegation added that the Dominions did not possess enough up-to-date information concerning British policy. The latest news they had received was Chamberlain's telegram. The C.O.S., reviewing the delegation's report, wrote that in view of the changed situation, the Admiralty were revising their Eastern War Memorandum, but it was "undesirable that the Dominion Governments receive the revised memo without being given a statement of our policy in the



latest vein".

The J.P.S.C.,<sup>34</sup> took a closer look at the report of the Wellington Conference. They noted that the size of the fleet to be dispatched to the Far East, and its date of its arrival at Singapore, would depend on the moment that Japan came into the war; and on the losses, if any, which the Axis and the Allies had sustained in the European theatres. The Wellington Conference had made it clear "that the uncertainties referred to ... did not alter the intention of the U.K. Government to dispatch a portion of the fleet to the Far East immediately on the entry of Japan into the war". This fleet would act on the defensive, to the extent of giving "a measure of cover to Australia and New Zealand", and the intervention of Italy would not alter this intention. Pending the arrival of the fleet, Japan would have the initiative, and she might well, throwing caution to the winds, launch a large-scale attack on the two Dominions. As long as Japan had this initiative, she could pick and choose her objectives.

It was a gloomy prognosis. It could have been gloomier, for the Dominions had not been told that the British were about to tell the Americans that a British fleet would never leave the Mediterranean.

The British were now forced to play the old role of perfidious Albion. Circumstances dictated that they tell three different groups three different stories, though each story was sufficiently similar not to completely contradict the other. But, to the Dominions there was only one story - the 1937 policy held good.

The worst example of British duplicity was Ismay's genteel lies to the Australian Acting High Commissioner, Duncan, concerning the British resolve to send a fleet east. A close



second was Chamberlain's telegram to Lyons. In fact, the British had begun to separate the defence of Singapore from the protection of the Dominions from invasion. The willingness of the British to send a fleet east was being watered down, and the priority attached to Singapore was taking second place to demands in the Mediterranean. But one senses that the original idea - that Japan would not move so far from home so long as the British Fleet remained in being - made it easy to push aside the Dominions' fears. It was a grim dilemma. Not to promise the Dominions protection would imply the end of the Empire, and their movement into the American orbit. Yet how to make the commitment a reality with limited resources? The need was for Allies.

The most immediate ally was the French. They too were told a different story. Far Eastern considerations were played down, and a commitment was made to consult with the French before a fleet was sent to the Far East. Yet as commonsense would dictate, it was unlikely that the French would readily agree that the British should pull out their major weapon.

The Americans were told a story that came closest to the reality of the situation. Certainly what they told the Americans was radically different from what they told either the French or the Dominions.

On June 14, 1939<sup>35</sup> in a lengthy dispatch to Sir Robert Lindsay, the British Ambassador to the United States, made clear the limitations of British naval strength. The Ambassador was told that former British policy had been based on holding the two ends of the Empire, the United Kingdom and Singapore. However, such plans had been based on Italy's





being neutral. This premise was no longer valid, and "it is useless to disguise the fact that the present and potential naval strength of this country is not sufficient ... to engage three naval powers simultaneously".

The Admiralty was now in the unenviable position of having to retain at home and in the Mediterranean sufficient forces to meet the threats from Germany and Italy, yet "at the same time, the importance of protecting Singapore and the Pacific Dominions is such that they cannot contemplate a complete reversal of their earlier intention to dispatch a fleet to Far Eastern waters". While still adhering to the former policy, the Admiralty would not state when the fleet would be sent nor its size, both of which would have to be decided according to the strategic situation at the time. In these circumstances, the attitude of the United States and the deployment of the American Fleet would be of critical importance. "Although this factor is at present too uncertain to justify H.M.G. in basing their own plans upon any estimate of it", the Cabinet wanted the Americans to know the difficult naval situation "in which they would find themselves if faced by a hostile combination "of the three Axis powers. Was it possible, Lindsay was asked, to get some statement of American intentions?

In fact, the Americans had already known of the weakness in the British naval strength.<sup>36</sup> This information had been given them by Commander T.G. Hampton, an officer from the Plans Division of the Admiralty. He had been sent to Washington in May 1939. He had pressed the Americans to station part of their Fleet at Singapore. He told Admiral Leahy that if Britain was at war with Italy and Germany, it would



be impossible for the Admiralty to send any ships to the Far East. In this event, the responsibility for Allied security in the Pacific would be in American hands. While Leahy refused to send any or part of the U.S.N. to Singapore, he did accept a division of strategic responsibility between the R.N. and the U.S.N. This would entail an American naval control in the Pacific, and a sharing of the burden in the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

There was little doubt that the Fleet would not arrive in the Far East in the manner expected by the Pacific Dominions. Certainly the Americans based their naval plans on the basis of the R.N. not being in the Pacific in force,<sup>37</sup> and knowing that the U.S.N. would have to take the brunt of Allied defence.

In London, the C.O.S. view was that by September, the Admiralty could spare seven capital ships for the Far East if the Mediterranean were stripped of naval forces. On June 26, the C.I.D. decided that no lesser number could be sent, and that the seven ships could not be spared.<sup>38</sup> The only alternative was for Britain to negotiate with Japan at some risk to her Far Eastern interests, for the hopes of naval support from the United States were diminishing.<sup>39</sup>

However, as has been noted, negotiations with Japan were one thing the Foreign Office would not stomach. The British were aiding the Chinese, by issuing them credits to buy British goods and exchange equalization funds to nurture Chinese currency.<sup>40</sup> The root cause was the basic conflict between Japan's aims of establishing a new order in East Asia and the opposition of both Britain and the Americans to Japan's aspirations.<sup>41</sup> From early 1939 to late December, Anglo-Japanese relations deteriorated.<sup>42</sup> On





June 18, 1939, these were at a low point. The C.O.S. reported to the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence<sup>43</sup> stating unequivocally that Britain was in no position to safeguard her trade, territories and interests against three Axis powers in combination. In the present situation the decisive consideration was the active support of the United States. If Britain did not have this, the Admiralty would have to dispatch a fleet of not less than eight capital ships to the Far East. Such an action "would endanger our position in Europe to an extent, which from a military point of view, would be quite unjustifiable". All that could be done would be to send two capital ships to reinforce the China Squadron, without giving up the Eastern Mediterranean. This reinforced Squadron could only act as some form of "deterrent" against the Japanese from moving south into Australian waters or into the South China Seas. If, however, the Japanese did move south in force, all the Squadron would be instructed to "retire westwards" to Trincomali in Ceylon. The Japanese would then be in a position to invest Singapore. To relieve it, a force of eight British capital ships would be needed, including three from home waters and all three from the Mediterranean. This would denude the Mediterranean and leave only three capital ships in home waters. "This was quite unacceptable." So, unless the Americans entered the war, the C.O.S. recommended that Britain negotiate with Japan. If the Americans did not intervene and the Japanese moved, then the two capital ships should be sent to the Indian Ocean. If the Americans did come in, the sending of these two ships to co-operate with the U.S.N. "would be a proper strategic measure". This was the first mention of that position.

Chatfield thought this unduly pessimistic.<sup>44</sup> He immediately



set down his own assessment of the naval situation as it pertained to the sending of a fleet to the Far East. In essence, his memorandum<sup>45</sup> was a brief history of the "Fleet to Singapore policy" and a repetition of his own well-known views - that a fleet must be sent to the Far East, should Japan go to war. He sadly noted that the promise to dispatch the fleet to the Far East had been severely compromised, and concluded by asking the C.O.S. to draw up a further, more detailed appreciation of the Far Eastern situation.

They did this.<sup>46</sup> They repeated what they had said weeks earlier, but with certain embellishments that dealt with the more technical problems of sending a fleet to Singapore, insisting that, in order to deal with the five German heavy ships, the Admiralty would have to employ five capital ships, accompanied by aircraft carriers in home waters.

More optimistically, they hoped that if France concentrated her Fleet in the Western Mediterranean, Italy could be denied sea supremacy in the eastern basin, even against light British forces. They believed that by September 7, 1939, they would be ready to send capital ships east. The problem in home waters was not the risk of defeat in battle, but the extra losses which might be borne by British trade at the hands of German raiders. Finally they agreed with the stated policy that it was up to the Cabinet to decide, in consultation with the French, the disposition of British naval forces to meet the situation in the Far East.

On June 26, the C.I.D. met to discuss both Chatfield's memorandum and the two appreciations by the C.O.S.<sup>47</sup> This meeting had also to deal with a difficult issue: what should the Prime Minister tell the Dominion High Commissioners con-





cerning British Far Eastern naval strategy? The C.I.D. also had to cope with a cable from the Australian Prime Minister (now Robert Menzies) asking if his government could be given assurance that should war break out with Japan, a British fleet would be sent to Singapore "within appropriate time and capable of containing the Japanese Fleet" to the extent of stopping any major attack on Australia.<sup>48</sup>

The C.N.S.', Sir Dudley Pound, outlined the present situation. He told the Committee that in certain categories of ships, such as aircraft carriers, heavy and light cruisers and destroyers, any fleet sent to the Far East would be inferior to the Japanese Fleet. He felt it was unreasonable for the French to contemplate keeping three battleships in the Mediterranean to match two Italian capital ships. It would be better if one moved into British home waters, to free a British capital ship for the Far East. However, regardless of what size fleet was sent to the Far East, it could not stop the Japanese from seizing Hong Kong or prevent them from "humiliating" Britain in China.

Pound's views fell on the receptive ears of the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax. He informed the Committee that if Pound was correct, to send a fleet east would be accepting a large risk in home waters in order to accomplish very little in Asia. Nor did he believe that the strength of the fleet sent could intimidate Japan. Obviously, Halifax and Pound did not accept the Chief of Staffs' second, more optimistic appreciation. Yet, it was clear that something had to be done. Britain was being consistently insulted by Japan in China, and this had led to a loss of British prestige throughout Asia and more importantly, in India.

Unfortunately, the issue could not be resolved. Britain did not have the strength to get tough with Japan. Only if the





United States agreed to concerted action would the scale tip in favour of the democracies in the Far East. But as Chamberlain noted, little could be expected from the Americans, and the "best way of obtaining anything from America was not to ask for it". Halifax added that it was not possible to contemplate any action against Japan, and that "our object must be to shorten our line" to reduce the chances of further continuous humiliation. In the end, all the C.I.D. could recommend was that the Admiralty should examine the possibility of strengthening British submarine forces in the Far East, that the French be persuaded to leave two battlecruisers in the Atlantic, and that the possibilities for negotiations with the Japanese be explored.

It was now up to Chamberlain's tact and diplomacy to explain British Far Eastern naval policy to the Dominions. When he met with the two High Commissioners,<sup>49</sup> he alluded to the C.I.D.'s conclusions of May 2, that the British could not say definitely when a fleet could be sent to the Far East, nor what size it might be.

Chamberlain passed over the fact that these conclusions had been carefully kept from the Dominions by telling the High Commissioners that the British had waited until a chance occurred to elaborate the whole of British policy. He went on to repeat the conclusions of the C.I.D. reached the previous day: that it was British policy to avoid war with Japan, and to negotiate a settlement if possible. Because the Japanese were fearful of the Americans and were tied up in China, they might not opt for war. Yet if conflict did break out, it would, as Chamberlain put it, "create an awkward dilemma", a euphemism for saying clearly that the Dominions could no



longer count with certainty on the arrival of the British fleet in the Far East. The Australian High Commissioner, Bruce, apparently did not grasp exactly what Chamberlain was saying, and kept asking what size fleet the British would send to Singapore if war broke out in Asia. He stated, what was true, that the Admiralty had told him in 1938, when he expressed doubts about the British promise concerning a fleet, that two modern battleships plus five Royal Sovereigns would be sent east.\* Bruce also was more optimistic than Chamberlain about the chances of American intervention. He quoted a conversation his Prime Minister had had with President Roosevelt in Washington. When Menzies had asked the President what he would do if the Japanese were to send naval forces south of the Equator, Roosevelt had replied: "you need not worry".

When the meeting ended the Dominion representatives still did not really understand the limits to British naval strength. Nor did they fully grasp what Chamberlain was trying to get across - that a fleet might not be sent to Singapore. Nor were they told of the memo from Pound, that the C.I.D. had received the previous day,<sup>50</sup> in which he stated that there were just not enough ships to meet British commitments.

Nor, as it transpired, was this information made available to Menzies. When Chamberlain replied to his cable, he confined himself to repeating exactly what he had previously told Lyons: that Britain would prevent any major operation by

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\* In fact, this was exactly the composition of the Far Eastern fleet in 1942, except that by then the two modern ships, Repulse and Prince of Wales had been sunk.





Japan against Australia or India, that sea communications would be secured in the Indian Ocean, and Singapore would be held.<sup>51</sup>

It was soon apparent that the Pacific Dominions were not completely satisfied with the answers that had been given to their constant queries. Two weeks after his meeting with Chamberlain, the Australian High Commissioner was again in conference with British officials.<sup>52</sup> As before, Bruce tried to elicit from the Admiralty when the fleet would be sent to the Far East and what size it would be. According to Bruce, he had been previously given an unqualified promise by the Admiralty that a fleet would be sent. Thus, according to Bruce, the Chamberlain cable to Lyons of March 20, which suggested a wateringdown of that promise, had come "as a bombshell". Bruce's impression was that if necessary, the Mediterranean would be sacrificed so that the fleet could move to the Pacific. Chatfield told Bruce that the British had hoped that Italy could be detached from the Axis, but this policy had since failed. The strategy now propounded, was to hit Italy and knock her out of the war. But, it was now felt that a war with Japan would start first. He asked if the decision had already been taken not to send the fleet to the Pacific. At this point, the Dominions' Secretary, Inskip, (who had been replaced by Chatfield as Minister for Co-ordination of Defence), assured the High Commissioner that no decision had been taken of which the Australians did not know.\* And he added that the telegram to Menzies still held good. In all, Bruce did not get the hard commitment he wanted, nor, contrary to what Inskip told him, were the Australians fully aware of

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\* My Italics.



just how compromised the promise of 1937 had become.

When the C.I.D. met again on July 24 to discuss Grand Strategy<sup>53</sup> in the event of war, the question of concentrating against Italy first in order to eliminate her from participation was still unresolved. Discussion centered, as before, on the relative merits of holding the fleet back to conduct operations against Italy, or of sending it immediately to the Far East should Japan enter the conflict. Chatfield complained that every time he attended a meeting of the C.I.D., strategic policy changed, due, he felt, to the Anglo-French conversations. It was Chatfield who kept before the Committee the point that if the strategy to knock Italy out of the war was adopted, "the old policy governing the dispatch of a fleet to the Far East, which was to the effect that no risks in the Mediterranean would be allowed to stand in its way" no longer held. After much discussion, it was decided that to adopt an offensive policy towards Italy "far from improving would tend to weaken our position in the Far East".

Yet as the C.I.D. were aware, time was running out. Germany had taken over all of Czechoslovakia in March, and a month later, Hitler had torn up the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, and was already gearing up his armed forces for an attack on Poland. In the U.S.S.R., Maxim Litvinov had been suddenly relieved of his post as Foreign Commissar. Litvinov had been a constant supporter of the League of Nations and had tended to direct Soviet policy against Germany. His replacement, Vyacheslav Molotov, was a grimly passive party official whose orders were to execute Stalin's new policy of rapprochement with Germany. In the Far East, Japan kept up her incessant pressure against the Western Powers.



In Tokyo, on August 9, 1939, His Majesty's Ambassador sent his last dispatch before war started in Europe. He again asked for a show of British naval power in the Far East.<sup>54</sup> Craigie assumed that the French Fleet, in combination with the Royal Navy, could allocate some naval units to the Far East. He believed that the French, by holding off the Italian Fleet, would give the British such enormous superiority over the Germans that it would permit some ships to be dispatched to Australia or Singapore. The Ambassador also made the point that the Americans, having denounced the American-Japanese Commercial Treaty of 1911, were looking to the British to demonstrate similar toughness towards Japan. Craigie thought that if Britain could show some teeth, the wind would be taken out of the sails of "those inveterate American critics who proclaim that over Tientsin, as over Manchuria, His Majesty's Government are betraying, in the cause of appeasement, the common interests of both countries".

Time did not allow for a reply to Craigie's dispatch. At 11:15, September 1, 1939, on a brilliant sunny day, German troops and planes crossed the Polish Frontier. The Second World War had begun.





FOOTNOTES

1. D.P.(P) 44, 20/2/39, Cab. 16/183A.
2. Reinforcement for the Far East, M0536/39, Adm. 1/9909.
3. C.I.D. 348th meeting, 24/2/38, Cab. 2/8.
4. Memo First Sea Lord to Strategical Appreciation Sub-Committee, 28/2/39, Cab. 16/209.
5. See M0446/39, Adm. 1/9879.
6. Memo First Sea Lord to C.I.D., 28/3/39, Cab. 16/209.
7. S.A.C. Meeting, 1/3/39, Cab. 16/209.
8. S.A.C. Meeting, 13/3/39, Cab. 16/209.
9. S.A.C. 16, Memo D.C.N.S., 5/4/39, Cab. 16/209.  
Also D.P. (P) 48, Cab. 16/183A.
10. See Dispositions of C/S 1/4/39, Adm. 1/9919.
11. See for example S.A.C. 6th meeting, 17/4/39, Cab. 16/209.
12. The Americans had already demonstrated some willingness to "co-operate". On March 22, 1939, Lord Halifax informed the American Ambassador Joseph Kennedy, that Britain had promised the Pacific Dominions to send a fleet to the Far East, but now the British were unable to do so, as the French made it clear that if the British Mediterranean Fleet went east, France would not co-operate in opposing Hitler in Central and Eastern Europe. C. Hull, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, London, 1948, Vol. I, p. 630. In April, the U.S.N.'s visit to the World Fair was cancelled, and it sailed for the Pacific after the annual fleet exercises in the Caribbean. Morrison, Op. Cit., Vol. III, p. 38.
13. See for example Adm. M06675/38, M03546/38 in Adm. 1/9530, also C.O.S. 257 and 258 meeting, Cab. 53/9, C.O.S. 710 4/5/38, Cab. 53/38, J.P. 282 31/3/38, Cab. 55/12, and C.O.S. 826, 18/1/39, Cab. 53/44/.



14. Chamberlain had told the House that the corner stone of our defence policy must be the security of the U.K. ... unless Britain can be defended, "our defeat will be certain whatever might be the fate in secondary spheres elsewhere"... our first main efforts must have two objectives. We must protect this country and we must preserve the trade routes upon which we depend for our food and materials. Our third objective is the defence of British territories overseas from attack, but taking them in order of priority, they are not as vital as the defence of our own country, as long as we are undefeated at home, although we sustained losses overseas we might have an opportunity of making them good hereafter. Quoted in cable to Lyons 11/3/38, Cab. 21/893.
15. Copy Lyons to Chamberlain, 10/3/38, Cab. 21/893.
16. Chamberlain to Lyons, 11/3/38, Cab. 21/893.
17. S.S.D.A. to G.G.N.Z. 4/8/38, in Wood, Op. Cit., p. 67.
18. C.I.D. N.Z. Co-operation in Imperial Defence, C.O.S. 833, February, Cab. 55/44, and J.P. 350, Cab. 55/14.
19. Meeting Ismay with Duncan 18/3/39, Cab. 21/893.
20. Sydney Morning Herald, 24/2/39, Melbourne Argus, 27/2/39, and High Commissioner to Australia, Sir Geoffrey Whiskards to S.S.D.A., No. 63, 16/3/39, Cab. 190/80, and Cab. 21/893.
21. Lyons to Chamberlain, 19/3/39, Cab. 21/893.
22. Chamberlain to Lyons, 20/3/39, Quoted C.I.D. 362 meeting, D.P. (P), 24/6/39, Cab. 2/9. For reasons that are unclear, the late Major/General Woodburn Kirby, in his War Against Japan, Vol. I, has Lyons telegram and Chamberlain's reply dated June 1939. In fact, both were dated March 1939, as Butler correctly notes. Major/General Woodburn Kirby, The War Against Japan, London, 1957, Vol. I, p. 20, and J.R.M. Butler, Grand Strategy, London, 1957, Vol. II. Lyons had died on April 7, 1939.
23. C.N.S. note (By Private Secretary) to Ismay, 23/3/39, Cab. 21/893.





24. Memo by D.C.N.S., 4/4/39, Cab. 21/893.
25. C.I.D. 1527-B 8/2/39, Cab. 4/29.
26. A.F.C. (39)1, 14/3/39, and A.F.C. (39)1, 20/3/39, Cab. 16/209. Also Points II and III of S.A.C. 13 AP/39, Cab. 16/209, and D.P.(P) 45, Cab. 16/183A.
27. J.P. 381 and C.O.S. 861, 22/3/39, Cab. 55/15.
28. S.A.C. 6th meeting, 17/4/39, Cab. 16/183A.
29. D.P.(P) 61, A.F.C.(J) 53, Cab. 16/183A.
30. Letter to Chatfield, 12/4/39, Cab. 21/893.
31. C.I.D. 355th meeting, D.P.(P) 2/5/39, Cab. 2/8.
32. Wood, Op. Cit., pp. 76-77.
33. C.O.S. 298th meeting, 25/4/39, Cab. 53/11.
34. J.P. 423, 31/5/39, Cab. 55/16.
35. F.O. to Sir Robert Lindsay, 14/6/39, No. 34/3100/C Cab. 21/893.
36. Watson, Op. Cit., pp. 99-100. Also Naval Staff History. Vol. I, p. 14, Gill, Op. Cit., pp. 42-43. P. 43, fn. The Australians were not told of this May visit by Hampton to Washington and what transpired, finally. Morrison, Op. Cit., Vol. III, P. 49.
37. Matloff and Snell, Op. Cit., p. 7-8, and Morrison, Op. Cit., Vol. III, p. 49.
38. C.O.S. 928, 18/6/39, and C.O.S. 931, 26/6/39, Cab. 53/50.
39. Matloff and Snell, Op. Cit., p. 8 fn.
40. Debates, H. of C., Vol. 344, Col. 2147-9, and Vol. 355, Col. 1602-17.
41. Jones, Op. Cit., pp. 148-54; Hull, Op. Cit., Vol. I, pp. 719-20, R.I.I.A. Documents, 1939-46, Vol. I, pp. 556-8, Sir Robert Craigie, Behind the Japanese Mask, London, 1946, pp. 72-76.



42. From April, 1939, Anglo-Japanese relations were badly strained over the Tientsin incident. Briefly, it concerned the murder of the Chinese manager of the Federal Reserve Bank within the British Concession of Tientsin. Four suspects were in the British Concession and the British Concession Authorities refused to hand them over to the Japanese. The issue escalated to a point where Britain could easily have been put in a position of giving up her rights in Tientsin, and being forced to co-operate with the Japanese in certain of their policies in respect to China. A compromise of sorts was worked out in Tokyo, after negotiations between the two parties in August. During the crisis, it became evident that all the British could do was play for time, as little help was expected from the United States. Fortunately the German Soviet Non-Aggression Pact pushed the issue into the background of Japanese diplomacy, allowing the situation to remain unresolved, but defused: Jones, Op.Cit., pp.148-55.
43. C.O.S. 928 18/6/39, Cab. 53/50. Also Cab. 16/183A. In this report, the C.O.S. estimated that the efficiency of the I.J.N. at 80% of the Royal Navy, particularly in terms of maintenance and lack of training of Artificers. British ship engines were in fact badly designed. By 1945, the engines in British warships were 17 years behind the American ones in design and efficiency. The high level of skill of British engine room personnel helped make up for the badly designed engines. Capt. L.E.S. de Bailly, R.N. "The Mobility of the Fleet", J.R.U.S.I., Vol. 110, May 1965, pp. 154-5.
44. Dilks, Op. Cit., p.108.
45. D.P.(P)62, 23/6/39, Cab. 16/183A.
46. C.O.S. 931, 24/6/39, Cab. 53/50, and D.P.(T)61, Cab. 16/183A.
47. C.I.D. 362nd meeting, 26/6/39, Cab. 2/9.
48. Menzies to Chamberlain, 24/6/39, Cab.21/893.
49. D.P.(P)48, 28/6/39, Cab. 16/183A.



50. C.P.(P)63, 27/6/39, Cab. 16/183A.
51. C.I.D. 362nd meeting, Op. Cit.
52. Meeting, Dominions' Office, 11/7/39, Cab. 2/9.
53. C.I.D. 368th meeting, 24/7/39, Cab. 2/9.
54. Craigie to Halifax 9/8/39, M-1188/39, Adm. 1/9909.  
Also Craigie to War Cabinet 25/9/39, Cab. 21/893.













